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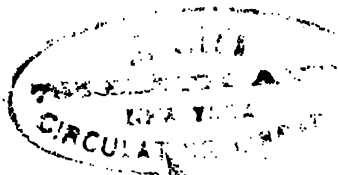
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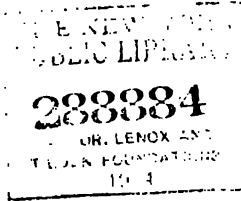
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
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COLONEL DACRE.

BOOK I.—AUTUMN.

CHAPTER I.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

"Is her love still

Upon the growing hand? Does it not stop
And wither at my years? Has she not view'd
And entertained some younger, smooth behavior,
Some youth but in his blossom, as herself is?"

A THREE-DAYS-OLD October moon was just setting behind the larch-wood fringing the far edge of a lately-plowed, chocolate-colored field on his right hand, as Colonel Dacre drew near the gates of the home avenue. It was a tenderly-pathetic evening. Along the base of the sky were grand lines of cloud; above these a clear heaven, giving promise of slight autumnal frost. Under the lines of cloud were sweeping undulations of hill, sparsely dotted with lights from wide-lying upland farms. Between the road along which Colonel Dacre was being driven, and the scene at which he gazed across, was a deep, gorge-like valley, already full of mist, through which, here and there, twinkled the lighted casements of unseen cottages. As the lights had begun to shine on the hill-sides and in the valley, the stars began to show palely in the sky.

The carriage turned an abrupt corner of the road, and a few minutes after Colonel Dacre was within his own gates. From thence a drive of half a mile, heathery-banked and fir-shaded, brought him to his own door.

The door stood wide, showing a warm, ruddy glow from logs burning on the hearth, which seemed to bring the dark browns and dim crimson of the interior into pleasant harmony with the only half-seen gorgeous coloring of larch and birch, of beech and oak, of maple and wild cherry, held in solution by the October twilight outside.

At the sound of the carriage wheels upon the drive had arisen a great barking of dogs, bringing Miss Dacre into the hall. Her brother's arm was soon around her; he held her lovingly, and gave her close and warm kisses; but, even as he did so, his eyes searched beyond her, seeking some else. The carriage had driven round to the back of the house directly Colonel Dacre had sprung out of it.

"Where are the others?" he questioned, after a few moments.

"You mean, 'Where is Alice?'" was answered, mischievously.

"Alice and Grace; but, of course, chiefly Alice."

"And where she is exactly, I can't tell you—but not far off, I'm sure. We half expected you yesterday, brother. When you failed us yesterday, we expected you quite early this morning. Alice hardly slept last night, and has been wandering and watching all day. So you mustn't be disappointed if she looks fagged and pale."

"But where do you think she is now?"

"I thought she might have meant to meet you at the gate."

"I don't think she was likely to intend to do that."

"Perhaps not. Anyway, she can't be far off. The dogs will announce you to her, and she will soon appear. You must be cold and hungry. Let us shut the hall door and go in."

"Let the door stay open, if there is any chance that Alice is still out! But should she be out so late, Olivia? The evenings are cold and damp now. The mists lie thick in the valley."

"You know, Walter, what a little outdoor creature she is; with always some pretty excuse of moonrise or sunset, of twilight or starlight, or bird's song or flower scent, for postponing what she feels the evil hour of finally coming indoors."

"Not changed in that, then!"

"Not in that, nor in any thing; unless to grow sweeter, brighter, better."

The brother's eyes eloquently thanked the sister for those words. Then he went from the hall to the porch, from the porch to the drive, and looked to the right and to the left. No one was in sight.

"If I try to find her, I shall probably miss her," he said; "so I will wait till she finds me."

And he allowed Olivia, her hand passed through his arm, to lead him into one of the rooms which opened on the hall.

"No changes here, I hope?" he exclaimed.

looking round him on the noble room, where every thing was toned down to a dim richness by years of use.

"No change in any thing, except such as time will make in spite of us."

They stood together on the rug, before the bright wood-fire, and looked at each other.

"Well, Olivia, and what have you to tell me? Surely a world of things."

Colonel Dacre's keen, bright eyes looked self-amused as he said this, and a glow of color, that might have been called a blush, came into his bronzed face.

"Yes, a world of things—and yet hardly any thing that you do not know, or would not be able to find out, without a word from me. As to my chief charges, Grace and Alice, I have but one source of discontent with Grace—that she is too entirely self-contented. As to Alice, it is dangerous that I should begin to speak."

"No fear of wearying your present listener."

"But I have written every thing in my letters."

"I am ready to hear every thing again from your lips."

"Foolish fellow!"

"That is it, Olivia—an old fool is the worst of fools, and I am—"

"Not a fool for loving my Alice?"

"Not for loving her—God bless her! But how about expecting her to love me? In this I am, perhaps, a fool."

Olivia smiled, so secure and happy a smile that her brother's eyes moistened as he drank it in. "My good sister—my good, kind, unselfish Olivia!" he said, softly.

This brother and sister were strangely alike. She was ten or fifteen years the elder, and a very remarkable-looking woman. She was very dark, but her skin was smooth and clear, and let the blood speak through it eloquently; her dark eyes burned with an almost overeager brightness and enthusiasm, but theirs was generous enthusiasm, and their brightness was genial and kindly. The hair which framed the Velasquez sort of face was very abundant, soft and shining, but snow-white. She wore a bit of rich white lace pinned over it with opal pins, and this gave her a pleasing look of matronhood. She was tall and well-formed, both strong and graceful looking. Her dress, of a rich goldy-brown velvet, relieved with a touch of crimson at the throat, so became her that, seeing her thus dressed, one could not imagine her dressed otherwise. In her youth Miss Dacre had been nothing like so delightful to look upon as she was now. It had needed the experiences she had gone through to harmonize and mellow her nature. There had been something of fierceness in her fire, of bigotry in her enthusiasm; she had been turbulently passionate. If there was repose about her now, it had been won by hard fighting, and after many rounds. Miss Dacre's one feature of remarkable and characteristic beauty was her mouth.

The shape of her head was fine, her eyes were fine; there was something strong and striking, perhaps overstrong and slightly masculine, in her brow, but the mouth was really and rarely beautiful in its curves, its color, and its expression. Its extreme mobility, the fresh, soft crimson of its lips, and the unblemished perfectness of its ivory-white teeth, combined with the quick, bright flashings of her glance to give her a strangely youthful look, which contrasted quaintly and piquantly with her snowy hair. Perhaps an early change in the color of the hair was a family peculiarity, for Colonel Dacre's was already iron-gray, though his face, while decidedly not youthful, was full of fire and force, and his form of the vigor of midmanhood.

They had been some moments silent, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the fire, hers fixed on him, when she said, speaking out of what had been going on in her own mind,

"Yes, brother; I feel sure, quite sure, you will have no reason to be in any way discontented with Alice."

"Discontented, Olivia! I hardly need to be told that."

After glancing round the room to assure assurance that they two were still alone, he added, in a lowered voice,

"You know, sister, what my natural fear, which is my only fear, must be. That some one nearer her own age, and, in that respect at all events, better suited to her, should come between me and her heart."

"This has certainly not happened. Sure as I am that this has not happened, I feel no less sure that it will not. Alice has so grown up in reverence and love of you, and dutiful gratitude toward you, in enthusiastic admiration of you, you are so completely her hero, that only such change as could change her whole nature, and leave her no longer our Alice, could change her heart toward you. So I believe. Unless indeed there were, which there is not, and could not be, a younger you, a brother or a son, to be your rival."

Colonel Dacre, slightly shaking his head, tried to look gravely unconvinced; but a smile of tender content and of profound pleasure, beginning almost imperceptibly at the corners of his mouth, grew and grew, till it brightened over his whole face, bringing into stronger relief his likeness to his sister.

"If this is so, to you I owe it." Saying which, he took and kissed Olivia's hand, drew it through his arm, and held it there.

"Alice is, or so it seems to me," Olivia went on—"and I think I love her with the sort of love which would make me quick-sighted for any fault in her, just so perfect a little lady that, her love for you put aside, it would be difficult indeed to find any one fit for her among the young men of to-day. She has grown up for you, Walter, and it is only you who are worthy of her, or whose love could satisfy her."

"It is pleasant, truly, to be at home again, and hear such loving flatteries from such loving lips," commented Colonel Dacre, with happy, youthful, ringing laughter. "With all you have done, of every kind, in my absence, I know I shall be more than content; but most of all with the care you have had of Alice."

"All has been done to the best of my poor woman-wits' ability. But it is good, beyond any thing I can say, to have the master home again. As to the care I have had of Alice, that is but care for my own. She was mine, you know, Walter, and only mine, long before she was any thing to you, and I have not yet surrendered her."

At that moment the opening of the room door made Colonel Dacre turn abruptly toward it.

CHAPTER II.

"ONLY GRACE."

"All this
You only use to make me say I love him;
I do confess I do. But that my fondness
Should fling itself upon his desperate follies—"

"It is Grace," said Miss Dacre, first to see who it was entered the room.

"Yes, only Grace!" exclaimed that handsome young lady. She was about twenty, but with something in her bearing of self-satisfied stateliness that gave her the air of an older woman. "Only Grace," she repeated, with a humorous and indulgent appreciation of the absurdity of the fact that by these people this could be felt as an appropriate greeting for her—Grace Dunn. "I am very glad to see you home again, Uncle Walter," she added. "Yes, you may kiss me." And she graciously turned toward him a fresh, soft cheek.

"You think Mr. Blatchford would allow it?" was asked, maliciously.

"I shouldn't dream of consulting him. I am, and have every intention of remaining my own mistress."

"Of course, of course. But that does not preclude the taking a master, I suppose?"

"I certainly shall never take a master."

"Indeed! At any rate, you are looking very well, Grace; and I have no doubt Tom Blatchford will think so. It seems to me you have grown since I last saw you. You are as tall as Olivia, therefore tall enough for a woman. You mustn't grow any more, young lady."

"I can't really have grown since you last saw me, uncle; except, perhaps, a little stouter, and, let us hope, a little wiser."

"Not too much wiser, I trust, Grace. You were a very wise young person for your years when I went away."

"You needn't flatter yourself that I don't know you're laughing at me. I don't think I was particularly deficient in wisdom, for my years, as you say, but there was of course some

room for improvement, and I hope I have improved."

"In good looks you certainly have; as to any thing else, I can't possibly judge at present. Olivia has not given you a very bad character!"

"Indeed, I should hope not." Then, after a pause, with an effort to speak indifferently, Grace asked, "Did you travel from Ireland here alone, uncle?"

"No, Grace, I had a very pleasant companion. Why do you blush?"

"I didn't blush. I'm not given to blushing."

"My eyes deceived me, then—and flattered you."

"Don't tease her, brother. There, I will question for her. Was Tom Blatchford your pleasant companion?"

"He was."

"Well?" Grace asked, taking the questioning into her own hands. "Is he more sane than when he went away?"

"As to that, Grace, I must leave you to form your own opinion. To me he appeared not only sane, but sensible. No doubt he will be here to-morrow, if not to-day."

"I don't know that I will see him if he comes. I want first some guarantee that he is changed. I have found nothing to make me think so in his letters."

"Take care, Grace, that, in your anxiety to change him, you don't bring about such a change as you wouldn't be anxious to effect—in the nature of his feelings toward you."

"If there is any danger, or even any possibility, of such change as that, Uncle Walter, you won't deny that the sooner it takes place the better for us both. You won't deny that, will you?"

Colonel Dacre slightly shrugged his shoulders. He was walking restlessly to and fro, and wondering where Alice could be, what could so long delay her.

"That depends, Grace, upon what brings about the change. You must remember that Mr. Blatchford is my friend, that I can't forbid him my house, and don't wish my house made unpleasant either to him or to you."

"And I am sure, brother, Grace is the very last person who would wish to forbid him the house which is her home, or to make it unpleasant to him. She loves her old playfellow far too well to give him up—even for wilder follies or faults than his have ever been, or are ever likely to be."

"Surely, Aunt Olivia, that remains to be proved! I can not understand what you have seen in my conduct to make you think me so foolishly, so disgracefully infatuated."

Grace's color had heightened; she looked from her aunt to her uncle with her chin thrown up defiantly.

"I don't think it any proof of a foolish or disgraceful infatuation that you should be constant to an old friend, and able to forgive"

good many faults in one whose love for you has borne a great deal from you."

"I deny that Tom has borne a great deal from me. And if I have—and I don't deny that I have—a strong affection for him, I have probably a still stronger affection, or, at all events, respect for myself—anyway, too much respect to let me give myself to a spendthrift madman, who in twelve months would most likely disgrace and beggar me."

"If I believed the first part of your speech, Grace," said Colonel Dacre, "I should have little hope for you, and none for poor Tom if he became your husband. But I believe what you say of yourself as little as you believe what you say of Tom."

"We take a very early opportunity of quarreling, I must say, Uncle Walter."

"Are we quarreling, Grace?"

"Grace would be quick to resent the use by any one else of such harshly exaggerating language about Tom as she used, I well know, Walter. She uses it for the pleasure of hearing us contradict it."

"I know it, Olivia; but, as this subject has been brought upon the carpet, I am glad of the opportunity of telling Grace, before she and Tom meet afresh, that, in my opinion, she had better break her engagement once for all, and give up her lover, rather than enter upon a new struggle for mastery, in which the part she plays is a very unbecoming one, and in which she is quite sure to be worsted."

"I don't see any reason for being quite sure of that, uncle. Why should that be taken for granted?"

"According to my notions, the worst worsting of all would be what you might call victory. Your conquest would prove that you had no adversary worth conquering."

"According to your notions, as you say, Uncle Walter; but my notions are very different. Do you know that yours are a little old-fashioned—just a little behind the age?"

"So I suppose, from things I have heard of the age, and of what is new-fashioned; but I believe that it would be for your happiness, always assuming what I do assume, that you love him, to condescend to be old-fashioned—to trust to Tom's generosity to make concessions, instead of trying to extract promises from him as conditions. He is not a child, to be managed by bribes and threats. If you would content yourself with the natural influence a loving woman has over the man who loves her, I think your chance of happiness would be a fair one, and your influence at least as great as would be for the mutual good."

"I can not think of marrying a man whose conduct I can not approve," Grace answered, obstinately.

"We should none of us wish you to do that, dear," said Olivia. "What I complain of, or, rather, what I think Tom has some just right to complain of, is, that in all things you set up your standard as the right standard, your judg-

ment as the higher judgment, and expect nothing but submission from poor Tom. You think so much—too much—of your own dignity, and not at all of his. I'm sure, Grace, that, were I a man, and treated by the woman I loved as I have known you treat Mr. Blatchford, your conduct would provoke me to wilder and wilder follies, and I would certainly give you up rather than let you tame me."

The flash of Miss Dacre's eyes confirmed her words.

"Oh! Aunt Olivia," Grace exclaimed, patronizingly, "what a strange creature you are!—the truest woman, and yet with all your sympathies on the side of men! I can't help feeling that I am more right than you are—on this subject, at all events," was added, with conscious affability. "No modest, well-conducted girl, with a proper sense of her own value, could—"

"Excuse the interruption, Grace, but no girl really in love (not with herself) should have any sense of her own value, except to feel she has none."

"You see, uncle, our ideas are so totally different that it isn't much use for us to discuss these points."

Grace spoke very sweetly, with pity and a very mild contempt for the benighted individual with whom she was forced to disagree.

"Nevertheless, Grace, I shall wish and request to discuss these points with you again, on some fitting occasion. But now, does no one know where Alice is?"

The impatience of his tone accused of indifference those to whom he spoke.

"She was in her room when I came down," said Grace. "I have been expecting every minute to see her come in."

"In her room!" echoed Olivia, full of wonder. "Does she know Walter is come?"

"I'm not sure."

"What do you mean, Grace? You knew, and are not sure whether she knew!"

"For this reason, aunt," said Grace spoke more softly than she had yet spoken. "I put my head inside her door as I passed, and was going to speak, but Alice was kneeling by her bed, her face in her hands, so I came away quietly."

Colonel Dacre looked at his sister uneasily.

"I will go and fetch her," Olivia answered to his look, and went away. A minute after Grace, too, left the room.

CHAPTER III.

ALICE.

"Know you not the season sweet,
Windless, rainless, calm, and still,
Which, untouched of summer's heat,
Hath forgotten winter's chill?"

OLIVIA brought Alice no farther than the door. This she opened for her, and shut be-

hind her. Just within it Alice paused, a little dazed by the sudden gladness, warmth, and leaping fire-light into which she had been brought from the sad-seeming dusk of her room.

The oaken panels of the door made a telling background for Alice's loveliness; the peculiar charm of which was, perhaps, in the expression of the eyes, through which a sweet and wise maidenhood looked out of a face almost infantine in its flower-like delicacy of bloom. The texture and the tints of her complexion were of that utterly untouched by world's-use freshness and softness seldom seen save in a very young child, while those eyes were worlds of maidenly thought and feeling.

"At last, Alice; at last! The very last to welcome me!"

"Only think, Lonel, of my having fallen asleep!"

The little laugh with which this was said told of overtension; the sensitive mouth and the pretty chin quivered, the sweet eyes filled. She moved toward him, after that momentary pause, in a little flush and flutter of emotion. How his eyes gleamed, and how his heart beat, as he took the small cold hands in his, and drew her toward the fire. Then, his arm thrown round her, he folded her to him, as gently as if she had been indeed a flower. His face was leant down upon the golden head, and for some moments no word was spoken. He felt the quiver of a soft sob or two, and a few tears were shed against his breast.

"I did not mean a reproach, Alice," he whispered upon her hair.

"But I can't forgive myself for having fallen asleep. How could I do it?"

"You were wearied out with wandering, and watching for me."

"Yes, and I was very sad, thinking again to-day you were not coming, and fearing that some accident had happened. And I had been praying for your safety. And then, somehow, I fell asleep. And now you are come—you are here safe and well!"

Ending, she lifted up her head and smiled into his face. Her eyes, all the clearer for just-dropped tears, were full of love and of joy. He felt wonderfully satisfied; blessed as he had never expected to be blessed. Alice had spoken of "praying" with the simplicity of a child whose faith has never shrunk with shyness from the touch of scoff or doubt.

"Yes, thank God, here safe and well!"

As he echoed her last words, he looked down upon her with immeasurable tenderness. Then, pressing her a little closer in his arm, he said,

"Why, what a little thing you are, Alice! After Grace and Olivia, there seems nothing of you. You haven't grown a bit since I last held you here, not a bit!"

"Does that disappoint you? Did you wish me to grow?" was asked, a little anxiously.

"I don't think I wanted any change."

"I'm glad you didn't want me to grow, because I don't suppose I shall any more."

"I'm sure I didn't want any change."

"Am I to call you the old name?"

"By all means."

"Won't it sound foolish, now I'm so old! You remember how it began? When I was a child, and tried to imitate people who called you 'Colonel,' and couldn't get any nearer than 'Lonel!'"

"I remember, Alice, and the name is precious to me. All the more so that it has only been used by you, that it is your special name for me. Your Lonel you used to call me, Alice."

Alice smiled.

"I should like to hear you call me so now, Alice."

"Lonel, my Lonel!" she said directly; but she whispered the words so softly that he hardly caught them.

And then Olivia came in. They kept their relative positions. Perhaps Colonel Dacre looked a little shy. During these first few minutes of meeting he had been playing the lover more than his wont. But Alice smiled up at Olivia with no shyness in her happy face, which said as plainly as any words could have said,

"Every thing seems right and well, now Lonel is here!"

"That child is not ready for dinner, and it will be on the table in a quarter of an hour," Olivia reminded them. "And you, too, brother, want to change your dress. Every thing is ready for you in your dressing-room."

"I don't doubt that, Olivia, remembering your old fashion of spoiling me. Well, Alice, I must let you go as soon as I have got you, it seems. Why you are not ready for dinner, though, I certainly fail to see, while owning that I am not. But Olivia must be obeyed."

He released Alice, who, however, before she went away, held her lips up for his kiss, as a child might have done. He stooped and gave it, and then turned quickly aside, not wishing to meet his sister's bright watching eyes just at that moment.

"Well?" questioned Olivia. And then her brother took and clasped in his her hand.

"It seems all too entirely well," he answered her, in a somewhat hoarse voice, not quite under his own control. "Too altogether happy a coming home. Where is the flaw, Olivia? I being still mortal, there must needs be some flaw."

"It is time you had some happiness, Walter."

"Some happiness! But this is all happiness. And, even in the past, Olivia, with such a sister, I can hardly have had less than my share."

"You remember how your deer-hound would stand still any time to have his head patted? I think he must have felt as I do when you praise me. Possibly your praise is all the more precious from my knowing that the greater

pain you have ever suffered in your life was caused you by my hand."

"But how unconsciously! and how a thousand-fold atoned for!" And he kissed the hand he held.

Next moment he said,

"Surely, Olivia, Alice is very remarkably fragile? Why, when I held her just now leaning against me there seemed no weight nor substance in her."

"You must remember you had just seen, and felt, two very substantial people—Grace and myself. Alice is certainly slight and delicate in frame, but she is perfectly healthy—not robust, and of a highly sensitive nervous organization, but perfectly healthy. I have taken several opinions upon her, and they all agree in this."

"She is lovelier than ever. But the loveliness seemed to me quite too ethereal."

"She will look stronger when you have been home a little while. Don't you remember how, when she was still quite a child, she got ill—almost had nervous fever—merely from expecting you? Couldn't eat or sleep. It is something the same now. Only that now her feelings are, while of course much graver and deeper than ever before, under better control. When she has had the rest of being near you a few days, of finding that you are not disappointed in her, but love her as much as ever, she will be quite blooming again."

"She is a very flower for bloom now; only it is the bloom of so fragile a flower that one would dread for it both sun and wind, lest it should fade! However," and he smiled an apologetic smile, "I will try not to fatigue you with rhapsodies. At this first meeting I have allowed myself a little license. But I don't mean to forget that an elderly man is apt to be ridiculous under certain circumstances, and I shall do what I can to avoid being so."

"What strikes me as ridiculous, Walter, is that you should speak of yourself as 'an elderly man.' There is no danger of your being ridiculous in any other way, under any circumstance."

"You forget, Olivia, I might well have had a daughter older now than Alice is. It is strange to think of this; and it almost makes me feel as if I had done wrong in letting this child promise herself to me."

"Well, brother, you are generous. She knows you meant what you told her—that she may take back her promise, and be free, whenever she cares for freedom. Years have not nearly so much as people think to do with age," she went on; "it would be by no means impossible that I should be Alice's grandmother; yet, in spite of my white hair of long standing, I can't feel old."

"You! you will never be old, Olivia. You are one of the immortals." And he lovingly *passed his hand over the white hair.*

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF DARKNESS—LIGHT.

"And from that buried grief there sprang a flower,
A thing of beauty and of mystic power:
It breathed sweet breath along deserted ways,
And shone in sunshine of departed days."

OLIVIA believed that she loved Alice with the love of a mother for a peculiarly dear daughter; but, probably, it was a different love from that of any mother for any daughter; there being nothing of natural instinct in it, and so much of passionate romance.

"Little Alice" was the only child of Kenelm Fairfax, and he was the only man Olivia Dacre had ever loved with the love such a woman gives to her lover—to the man she has chosen for her husband.

In her youth, Olivia's temper had been hot and hasty, her pride and her will indomitable, what she called her "religion" an enthusiastic bigotry, quite lacking charity. And, in this passionate youth of hers, the interference of "friends," his friends, between her and the man she was to have married, brought about coolness and misunderstanding; and from these grew that

"Wrath with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain,"

and separated them.

Circumstances did nothing to bring them together again; neither of them had chosen to try and control circumstances. Each believed in the inflexible obstinacy of the other, and believed that to sue for reconciliation would be only to incur fresh wounds, both to love and to pride. His friends rejoiced in the separation; she had none who could help her—her brother being then a mere boy.

After a good many years Mr. Fairfax married Alice's mother, a lovely girl, devotedly attached to him. He married her out of compassion, because he saw no other way of helping her; his friends disliked this marriage more than they would have done that with Olivia, which, perhaps, was to him some source of satisfaction. The girl was of good family, but had been left a penniless orphan, and was occupying, when his attention was first drawn toward her, a half-menial position, for which her extreme delicacy and refinement, both of mind and of physique, made her peculiarly unfit. He married her. She enjoyed some months—they did not mount to years—of what seemed to her perfect happiness, and then she died in giving birth to Alice.

Alice was only a few months old when she lost her father. His death was the result of an accident, occurring while he was superintending some engineering works in a Cornish mine, of which he was the owner.

When Mr. Fairfax had, and knew that he had, only, at most, a few days to live, he sent for Olivia Dacre. He had been carried to a small inn close to the scene of the accident, and here Olivia came to him, and here she staid

with him till the end. He chose Olivia to be sole and absolute guardian of his child. He died with his hand in her hand, his head upon her breast. What passed between the dying man and Olivia no one, of course, ever fully knew. He was buried in the grave-yard of a small old church overlooking the sea. Immediately after the funeral, Olivia fetched the baby Alice home to her at Heatherstone. From that time the grief of Olivia's past seemed to have turned to sweetness and light. From that time Alice was the interest, the happiness, the poetry of Olivia's daily life.

When Alice was five years old, her whole fortune, which should have been great, was swept away by the swindling mismanagement of her father's confidential agent. Olivia was glad—glad, in spite of an awed consciousness that Kenelm would have been grieved. She clasped the child to her with a feeling that what had happened made Alice more entirely her own. Some of the relations of Alice's father, people who had shown willingness to make much of the little heiress, came forward at that time with offers of assistance in maintaining Alice—offers made for decency's sake, and which were so refused as to insure no repetition of them—a thing not much to be dreaded; and little Alice, no longer an heiress, was allowed to remain the exclusive and unenvied property of Olivia Dacre.

During Alice's childhood and earlier girlhood, Walter Dacre was only twice, and at considerable intervals, at home. But the way he was loved and revered by the being whom Alice most loved and revered made him the natural object of the child's and the girl's hero-worship. Of his bravery, his generosity, his chivalry, his tenderness, his humility, his unselfishness—in short, of all the virtues most distinctive of the true knight, accomplished gentleman, and Christian soldier, as his—Alice was always hearing. And not merely hearing his possession of all these virtues vaguely and abstractedly asserted, but hearing anecdotes of him, and details, such as both to teller and listener proved and realized such assertions. Olivia delighted to repeat to Alice all she knew of her own knowledge, and all she had, from time to time, heard from different of his friends, an illustration of her brother's spotless knight-errantry, his unflinching integrity, his unblenching courage, and his unsullied honor.

There was, however, one chapter of her brother's history which set some of these things in stronger light than did any other, of which, nevertheless, Olivia never spoke to Alice. Its events had happened before Alice was born, in Olivia's impetuous, unchastened days; they were of too harrowing a kind of tragedy, or so Olivia thought, to be retailed to so young, so susceptible and sensitive a creature. Olivia always shared with Alice the delight of her brother's letters—either reading them to her, or giving them to her to read to herself. Their tone and style, the slight rein of subdued and submissive

sadness, and the loving thoughtfulness for others running through them, just added the touch of grace and tenderness to Alice's heroic ideal.

Of Walter's boyhood, to which she had played the mother's part, Olivia was never tired of talking; dwelling on its gallant grace, its frank-eyed fearlessness, its noble ambitions, its most winsome lovingness.

Up to a certain time Olivia had been quite without second motive for this constant speech, which was always praise, of her brother. He was her nearest and her dearest, and what could be more natural than that she should talk long and lovingly about him to Alice, who loved to listen, she did not care how long?

Of all other young men—Colonel Dacre being nearly fifteen years younger than herself, and she herself, in spite of what she had suffered, feeling so young, she was apt to think and to speak of him as still in the early prime of manhood—Olivia was prone to judge harshly; she tried them by the standard of the real or the imagined brother, and either found or fancied them wanting. So when Olivia saw her darling Alice change from child to maiden, and began to wonder what man's breast could be worthy to wear so lovely a flower, she began also, involuntarily at first, to dedicate Alice to her brother. Alice was to make his future smile, and Alice was to soothe him from all memories of the past. For her part in the sorrow of that past she would, she felt, make, indeed, atonement if she gave him her Alice. Sometimes Olivia wondered whether, possibly, she had not overdone her eulogies; so much exalted her brother into a hero that fear and wonder could hardly leave room for love in so singularly timid while so staunchly loyal a heart as that of little Alice. But little Alice had some highly-prized memories, some childish experiences of her own, of the marvelous, almost feminine gentleness and loving patience of this "true Walter," which helped her to love him in spite of fear, though not, perhaps, with such love as casts out fear.

The child Alice had learned by heart, for the sake of its name, long before she could enter into the subtle pathetic beauty of its meaning, that exquisite ballad of Uhland's, "Vom treuen Walther." When the time came in which that meaning—of everlasting love and everlasting grief, of iron inflexibility toward sin, joined with most compassionate tenderness for the sinner—revealed itself to her, she felt that if ever she should prove "die falsche Maid," just so would her true Walter feel to the sinner and the sin; just so would he look down upon her, supplicating at his feet, his arms rigidly folded, but his eyes expressive of infinite pity, answering,

"Steh auf, steh auf, du armea Kind!
Ich kann dich nicht erheben,
Die Arme mir verschlossen sind,
Die Brust ist ohne Leben.
Sei traurig stets, wie ich es bin!
Die Lieb' ist hin, die Lieb' ist hin,
Und kehret niemals wieder."

CHAPTER V.

HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

"Sie spricht so ganz mit Kindersinne,
So fromm ist ihrer Augen Spiel;
Doch grosser Dinge werd' ich inne,
Ich schau in Tiefen ohne Ziel."

BETWEEN the times of Alice's fifteenth and of her nineteenth birthday, Colonel Dacre, then on home service, had been more at Heatherstone. On the last of these visits Olivia's bright eyes had detected a secret entirely in accordance with her heart's desire—a secret which Colonel Dacre himself supposed to be shrouded in profound mystery; this secret being that her brother's love for Alice had changed—was no longer the love given to a child.

Immediately on detecting this, it came to be with Olivia a matter of passionately enthusiastic longing that Alice, pure and unspotted from the world, by even a thought, in the untouched dew, perfect freshness, unbreathed-on bloom of her loveliness, both of soul and of body, should become Walter's wife. That thought, hope, idea, took full possession of Olivia. Looking on Alice, she many and many a time murmured to herself, smiling at the sweet music she found in her own murmur, "Walter's wife." She dwelt on this thought as a loving mother might have dwelt, and yet differently, without the jealousy with which a mother can hardly help thinking of a son's marriage. Very likely, indeed, there was more of selfishness than Olivia knew, though she taxed herself with some, in this longing of hers; because this giving away of Alice to Walter, of Walter to Alice, was so much more like keeping them both than any other giving away of either could possibly have been.

Somewhat Olivia's desire brought about at all events the beginning of its own fulfillment. Just a year before this last, best, and, as they all believed, final home-coming of Colonel Dacre's which has just been recorded, Alice, to her own amazement, to her own great awe, found herself the betrothed wife of her hero; almost unable to be conscious of joy through the vastness of her bewilderment. Perhaps it was Olivia who had the greatest and most untroubled joy in this betrothal—a betrothal which Colonel Dacre, for Alice's sake, wished at present should remain unknown. It was Olivia who could have cried, "Now let Thou Thy servant depart in peace;" but to whom, nevertheless, to remain in this bright world, sharing, while God so permitted, the happiness of the happy, seemed a yet more desirable thing.

Alice was marvelously unsophisticated. She had read no novels, heard few tales of love; she had listened to no light girlish talk of love and lovers. She could not doubt that she loved her "Lonel," nor that he loved her. She had always loved him, she had always felt herself *loved by him*. That there might be need for *love to change for love*, that his had done so *while perhaps hers had not*, she had no means

of knowing, no reason for suspecting. As far as she knew, all was right, or would grow right. Meanwhile, to find herself lifted from her self-assumed place at her hero's feet, to be raised to his side, told she was to share his life, to feel herself loved worshipfully, with reverence, held as something most precious and exquisite, instead of being allowed to worship—all this overwhelmed little Alice.

He had been wise, and he had been considerate. Though all through that last visit of his he had tried to make her feel the nature of the change in his love for her, had placed her on her woman's pedestal, whenever she would have taken her childish place at his feet, yet it was not till just as he was about to leave her that he put his changed love into words, let her feel something of a lover's passion in his "good-bye" clasp and kiss; and then he would not have her answer, would give her time to think, to accustom herself in his absence to the new aspect of things between them, to try to understand her own heart. Olivia, he told her, could write her answer to him, unless she liked better to write it herself.

Of course she had written the answer herself—in a little letter of what he felt to be adorable humility, simplicity, and lovingness. And of course her answer had been all in the sense that she was and would be his.

Had Olivia unconsciously betrayed her darling and deceived her brother? Nothing had yet happened to prove any thing either way. Sometimes, during that last year of absence, he had feared that this had been so, and had accused himself of ungenerous selfishness in letting so fair, so young, so innocent a creature bind herself to him, while she was yet ignorant of the whole world of other men. He assured himself, as in his letters he had assured her, that he would not hold her bound.

Sometimes, too, he felt as if he could also assure himself that Alice, as his wife, would have a happier, nobler, and more congenial existence than his knowledge of the world showed to him as likely to be hers in other hands. But on that view of the question he quickly checked himself from dwelling. He and Olivia had no right to play Providence for Alice—she must be left free to know, to will, to choose.

It had not been Alice's loveliness, nor his own lover-like consciousness of it, that had moved him to speak when he had spoken. It had rather been the echoing in his heart of some only too gladly-believed words of Olivia's, about what Alice suffered at the thought of this parting (words confirmed, as it had seemed to him, by what he read in Alice's own face when the hour of parting came), that had quickened to action his irrepressible longing to take the fair girl into his cherishing arms, and speak to her of the possibility that this, if she so willed it, should be their last such parting. Holding her hands in his, looking into her woe-begone little face, he said,

"Such partings as these are weary work,

Alice. Olivia tells me you have been grieving much at the prospect of my going away."

She only looked up into his face. The tears, of which her eyes had been full, fell upon her pale cheeks, and her mouth quivered convulsively. To watch the workings of that sweet mouth almost unmanned him. He went on,

"Olivia tells me the thought of this parting has tried you more than the thought of any other parting has ever tried you. Is this because you love me more than you have done before?"

She tried to answer; not succeeding, she suddenly hid her face in his breast, and sobbed there, as she would have done in Olivia's, had it been Olivia who stood before her. He clasped her to him then, and said,

"Alice, my darling"—he had never called her that before, and her heart made a sort of pause at the sound of the words—"would it help you—would it make things easier, and you happier, if you could think of this as our last such parting, and as only a short parting—not for years, but only for months?"

"You can't need to ask that, Lonel," she answered, so softly that he had to bend down his head to hear what she was saying.

"It might be so, Alice," he pursued, trying to speak calmly—speaking heedfully, with a sense of something precious hanging in a balance to which even an incautious breath might give a wrong turn, "if I could hope that, when I come home again, I should find that you have learned to love me."

He paused there. Alice lifted up her head and looked into his face with a child-like wonder and grieved surprise. The utter absence of all consciousness of what he could mean smote him grievously. He did not speak; he felt as if it would be in some sort disloyal to explain himself further, and trouble such quiet-heartedness. Such explanation must, at all events, be postponed—postponed till Alice was older; when he, too, alas! would be also older, and he had no years to lose. So thinking, some passionate sort of "divine despair" forced a sigh from him.

Meanwhile what was Alice saying? She was perplexedly echoing his words.

"Learned to love you, Lonel! Lonel, what can you mean? Have I not always loved you? do I not love you dearly?"

Then, either some new sense coming into the sound of what she said, or that sigh of his and what looked out of his eyes into hers as he breathed it, startled Alice. A wave of delicate, celestial, rosy red swept over her face, her eyes drooped before his. He gathered her closely to him; he told her, in a few strong, simple words, what he had meant.

No doubt the words were ordinary words enough, but they were spoken in a tone which, though very quiet, yet had something in it that shook Alice's heart; whether her agitation were most of fear or of delight she could not tell.

He would not have her answer. He transferred her from his own arms to Olivia's, who

had been hovering near, and was gone long, long before Alice had recovered from the shock. His last words had been,

"I have learned to believe, Alice, that such happiness as I never looked to experience might come to me from your dear hands if you could be happy in loving me as your husband."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE WINTER PASSED.

"The secret that doth make a flower a flower
So frames it, that to bloom is to be sweet,
And to receive to give."

As to how Alice should spend the year that was to intervene between that parting and the coming home "for good" of Colonel Dacre, there had arisen a difference of opinion between the brother and sister.

Colonel Dacre had suggested that she should pass at least part of "the season" in town, to see a little of society, and to be introduced (not as his betrothed, but as his sister's adopted child) to the very large Dacre circle of friends and connections. Of this Olivia would not hear. No doubt she had many reasons against it, but the one she urged—and urged so strongly that against her urging there could be no appeal—was the delicacy of Alice's organization.

"It would be just killing her," wrote Olivia. "She is perfectly healthy, but she is not strong. Pure country air, early hours, and simple ways are necessary for her. If you give her instead heated, impure atmosphere, excitement, and late hours, even for a few months or weeks, you will probably sow the seeds of disease. Remember, brother, that she is mine as yet—my daughter till she becomes your wife."

Of course this had settled the matter, and Alice had remained at Heatherstone. And now that year had passed, and Colonel Dacre was home "for good." Olivia wished that the engagement should now be made known in the neighborhood, and that a date for the marriage should be fixed. But in this Colonel Dacre would not yield. He said,

"Though I may feel I am growing old, and have no years to lose, we must remember what a young creature Alice is; she must have time, time to accustom herself to seeing me in this new light, and time to be sure she knows that she does not mistake her own heart."

If Colonel Dacre erred in his conduct toward his little betrothed during the first weeks he was at home, it was on the side of being too quiet and undemonstrative—too much afraid to startle her by any lover-like word or look. He was so much as he had always been, that at times Alice felt as if she might have dreamed all that made the difference. It is true that, when he spoke to her, something came into his voice, to harmonize with a something in his eyes which was not in eyes or voice for

any one else; but Alice had always been treated by him with extreme tenderness. He wondered sometimes if Alice had any notion of the inexplicable sort of happiness her mere presence gave him; but, for a number of dimly recognized reasons, all owing their existence, probably, to the generous nature of the man, he did not at present speak to her of this.

And Alice, during those first weeks, felt constrained, she could not guess why, to an unnatural sort of hush and stillness. She would walk beside Colonel Dacre, her hand upon his arm, up and down the wood-paths, over their rich, red, russet carpet of fallen beech-leaves, hardly speaking, sometimes hardly hearing what he said, because so much was always saying itself in her own heart, and so indistinctly that she had a sense of being on the strain to listen and to understand.

Once Alice carried something of her bewilderment to Olivia, asking softly,

"Did Lonel really mean it? Does he still wish it, do you think, Olivia?"

"Did he mean what? Does he still wish what, my darling?"

"Mean what he said before he went away—wish me to be his wife?"

Alice, who was sitting in the twilight, on a footstool at Olivia's feet, laid a blushing face on Olivia's knee.

"If you have any doubt, you had better ask Walter himself, Alice."

"I could not do that."

"But, child, you can't really have any doubt. Is it possible that Walter would speak lightly of such things, or change easily about them?"

Alice gave a little sigh, which startled Olivia.

"Why do you sigh, Alice? Why do you ask such questions?"

"Indeed, I hardly know."

"Are you not happy, Alice?"

"Happy, Olivia! I have never known what it was not to be happy, I think."

"Try and tell me, then, dear child, what made you question as you did."

"A sort of dreamy feeling that comes over me, as if it must be all a mistake—as if he must for a moment have forgotten that I was only Alice—as if he must have felt very disappointed, and as if he had made a mistake afterward."

"But it is just 'only Alice' that Walter loves as he never loved any one—think of that, Alice—not any one, before, and never will love any one again."

"I do think of that, and—it frightens me."

"But, Alice, it is nothing new to you to be loved."

"Indeed, no. But, Olivia, this is so different. You love me just as I am. Now, if what Lonel spoke of is to come true—if I am to be Lonel's wife" (she paused), "then I feel as if I had to learn to be something so different from what I am, so much more and better than just *only me*." She looked wistfully into Olivia's face, and said, in so softly awe-struck a voice

as to be hardly audible, "Think of me, just only me, being called 'Mrs. Colonel Dacre!'"

"Quite ridiculous, certainly." And Olivia fondly kissed the wistful white brow.

"Don't laugh at me, please, just now, because it is really all so very serious! Don't you remember how we used to talk of Lonel's marrying, and how we used to agree that it would be so difficult, almost impossible, to find any lady worthy to be his wife? How can I be fit?"

"Let us suppose, Alice, that you are not at all fit, but that he is so foolish as to think you fit, and to love you so dearly, so deeply, that he can't love any one else, ever, in that way. Well, dear, haven't we always spoiled him? Never refused him any thing? I have, at all events; and now he wants you, and I want to give you to him. But, to be serious, Alice, for a good while now it has been my heart's desire that you should be Walter's wife. You are, as you urge, an insignificant little thing—very little of you, physically, at all events; but you either are, or we think you, so pure, so true, so sweet, so lovely, that—"

Here Olivia's voice failed her. She kissed Alice's head, and leaned her own cheek upon it. But Alice was not silenced.

"Even if I were all that, still, oh! so far, Olivia, from being enough," she said. "We used to agree that his wife should be a grand woman, a noble woman, a queen among women. I used to think she should be a woman like you."

"White-haired, and almost old enough to be his mother?"

"Her hair need not have been white—though your hair is more beautiful than any other I have ever seen. And, of course, she might have been like what you were when you were younger."

"Well, sweet, it is labor in vain to speculate on what might have been. It is just you whom Walter loves. It is just you who can give sweetness and dearness and preciousness to his life. It is just you who are shrined in his heart. It is just you who are lovely in his eyes. It is just you who must be his wife."

At that moment Colonel Dacre himself entered the fire-lighted room.

"Walter," Olivia said, "Alice thinks you could not have really meant that you wish to make her your wife—that it must have been a dream, a mistake—that if, for a little while, you meant it, you must have changed your mind."

Colonel Dacre paused, where the full fire-light flashed on his face, and looked down on Alice.

"What do you mean, Olivia?" he asked; but he looked at Alice.

"It seems to Alice, Walter, altogether too ridiculous to be true that you should wish to make her Mrs. Colonel Dacre. Only some queen or princess is, according to Alice, fit for that honorable post. And Alice seems to think that you must have found out, Walter, that she is not fit for it—that she is too—What is it,

Alice? Ignorant, foolish, diminutive, altogether beneath your notice."

At that moment they both became aware that Alice was softly sobbing. She could not tell them why. The trouble was a real one, but a vague one; something it was impossible to put into words. She presently laughed at herself, however, and said,

"I think it was childish bad temper, because I felt as if I were being made fun of, when I was so very much in earnest."

Olivia left the soothing of Alice to her brother, and went away. After that Alice was not exercised by any more doubts as to whether Colonel Dacre "really meant it," or "still wished it."

During the year that had passed between Colonel Dacre's leave-taking confession and his return, Alice had dedicated herself to Colonel Dacre, trying, in every way she could think of, to make herself less unfit for her future, to raise herself a little nearer the standard of what she thought Lonel's wife should be. She had set herself to do this with such intensity that the year had been a strain upon her, and directly she was again in Colonel Dacre's presence—their changed position toward each other yet a novelty, practically, though she may have believed she had accustomed herself to it theoretically—she seemed to have failed in every thing. She felt, more than ever, childish and ignorant. She shrank, as from undue glory and exaltation, from her future. In fact, the child in Alice was tired of trying to play the woman. She needed rest; perhaps she needed amusement and equal companionship. The wealth of love poured upon her at once weighed her to the ground in humility, as a fragile flower is weighed down with wealth of honeydew, and gave her a sense of needing to lift herself beyond her own level to meet it worthily.

So, during these first weeks, Alice could hardly have been called happy. But, by degrees, in part owing to her own habitual freedom from self-consciousness, but in still greater part owing to Colonel Dacre's instinctive delicacy, wise forbearance, and patient undemonstrativeness, Alice found herself at rest. It came to feel as simply and happily natural that the place beside him should be her place, as, when he had once been some time at home while she was a tiny child, it had then been natural to claim as her place the stool at his feet. She could not help gradually learning how precious she was to him, how much happiness she could give him; and the joy born in her of this knowledge was very deep, very tender, very humble. To be all, and only, and always his, slowly came to be her one view of life.

Happily for Alice, his tender approval of all she said and all she did could not raise in her belief that she was perfect, but, while it stimulated her to try to be always her highest and best self of which he should approve, it also helped her to be so by setting her restfully at ease in his presence. Alice did not notice half the things Olivia noticed as signs of the

depth and intensity of Colonel Dacre's love. Olivia's bright eyes lost nothing. She noticed the expression, as if listening to satisfying music, with which Alice's movements were watched; his restlessness when she was absent from the room; the deep content that shone on his face when she re-entered it. These things, and how many others! Truly, Olivia, loving her brother as she did, must have trembled for him had she not been very sure of Alice. She was ready enough to own that probably there was not another girl of Alice's age in the world with whom such a love would have been safe, but she had no fear for it with Alice.

If Colonel Dacre could have welcomed any change in Alice, he would have liked a trifle more of playful lightness or of loving tyranny. Alice was almost too nun-like in the serious earnestness of her devotion, too much resembled "a maiden vowed and dedicate" to something more than mortal love.

"I wish, Olivia," he one day said, and there was a shade of impatience in his voice, of the ingratitude of which he was immediately ashamed, "you had not encouraged Alice to make quite so great a hero of me. I feel sometimes as if the manner in which she loves me must make that love a strain and a fatigue to her."

"When you first came home, and she was so afraid lest in any way she should disappoint you, I believe it was, I felt a little anxious about her. But not now."

"But now, even, she is too seriously worshipful; she is too humble. Surely you can find some way of teaching her that I am but a very ordinary mortal!"

"I should first have to learn that lesson before I could teach it," Olivia answered, with a tender-toned laugh. Then she went on: "The other day I tried a step in the right direction by abusing your crabbed writing; yesterday I called you (to Alice) a dreadful fidget about your flannel waistcoats. On both occasions I provoked from her a loving little rhapsody about your wounded shoulder, and the way you got the wound. What can I do, Walter? How can I help you?"

"God bless my darling!" came fervently from Colonel Dacre.

That winter passed very happily. At all events, Colonel Dacre had never been so happy. Old friends gathered round him, new duties pressed thick upon him. And the very secret of all sweetness nestled at his heart. The comic element of the Heatherstone atmosphere was supplied by the very last person who would have wished to appear in a comic light—Grace, and another person, Tom Blatchford, her lover, who was always glad to raise a laugh, even if it were at his own expense. As ill-assorted a couple, one would have said, as could easily be found, each bringing into high relief the faults of the other, and yet radically attached to each other, whatever Grace might pretend to the contrary.

BOOK II.—SPRING.

CHAPTER I.

SPRING TWILIGHT.

"In the spring twilight, in the colored twilight,
 Whereto the latter primroses are stars,
 And early nightingale
 Letteth her love adown the tender wind,
 That through the eglantine
 In mixed delight the fragrant music bloweth
 On to me,
 Where in the twilight, in the colored twilight,
 I sit beside the thorn upon the hill."

SPRING often came late to Heatherstone. Though the old house stood in a sunny and sheltered spot, it was on high ground, and the air all about it was keen and bracing. You passed into another climate when you left the shelter of its plantations and its shielded south exposure. This year, however, the latter half of April had been almost summer-like for warmth and beauty. No snow had lain even upon the moors since the end of March.

It was now May when Alice was sitting alone at twilight on a favorite seat, on the highest level of the steep terraced garden that, rising behind the house, was ridged in by the edge of the moor, a wide-sweeping billowy expanse, part of which had once been the county race-course. From where Alice sat she looked, through the rosy-blossomed boughs of an apple-tree, past the rich red, half-opened leaf-sprays of an ancient walnut, away over the many-gabled up-and-down irregular roofs, the quaintly picturesque variety of chimneys, and the gleaming high-up lattices of the old house, to a tract of loveliest and most subtle after-sunset color. She could watch the misty, purpling evening run up the folds of the hills, whose crests still shone in reflected light so bright and clear and vivid as to seem like sunshine, though the sun had set.

Alice had just finished reading a new poem which had been brought her the day before by Colonel Dacre. It was a simple, sad, sweetly said love-story, in which were, here and there, passages of true passion, and it had an intensely pathetic close. Its last words had been just read in the soft, enchanted light of that May evening; the book, open at its last page, still lay upon Alice's knee. Alice's cheeks were whitened by emotion, her eyes made larger and more lustrous, and their lashes were wet. Her face had a listening look, and her lightly-parted lips seemed ready for reply. By what *she had been reading, something had been stirred in Alice's quiet heart that stirred there the first time. What it was, whether pain*

or pleasure, sorrow or delight, which had been set vibrating, Alice, less than any one, could have told.

Alice knew it was time she should go indoors—knew that Colonel Dacre, who had ridden over to Greythorpe, a house he had taken for some friends, and in the preparation of which for their comfort he and Olivia had much occupied themselves, would probably about this time be returning, and would look for her to meet him, to question him, to listen to him, to show her sympathy in his interest and his anxiety. But this evening dutiful little Alice did not feel dutiful. To go indoors did not seem possible. The air was just one balmy fragrance, which a hundred sweet odors—from the flowers and the leaves, from the earth itself, from every thing between the earth and the sky, and even, so it seemed, from the sky itself—went to compose, and which the dew blended into bland harmony. And within Alice there was this new vibration, as of some hitherto untouched fibres of her being. And what this all meant—all this melody of sights and sounds and scents—what the thrush was singing, so gloriously as to rouse the rivalry of the nightingale—what the stream was saying in the valley, what the little wind that lifted the soft hair upon her forehead sighed out, she felt just as if on the very verge of discovering. She felt as if just another undisturbed moment and the clue to it all would have been hers.

And at that moment a well-beloved voice (in which, possibly, she should have felt the clue to it all) called her name.

"Alice! Alice! Alice!"

For the first time, and even now without her own consciousness that it was so, the sound of that voice was not entirely welcome. Perhaps Alice felt as some child feels who in its dreams has strayed into elf-land, who is about to be taught all the mysteries of the kingdom, to be able forever afterward to understand all the secrets of the flowers, all the sayings of the birds, the sorrows the dew is wept for, and the rain falls for, and what it is every thing laughs about when the sun shines, and the wind blows, and the streams babble and sparkle; and who then, just at the critical moment, is awakened by some mortal touch of lips or hand, and all its palace of pretty pleasures destroyed.

Perhaps, for the first time, Alice had been bordering upon some recognition of the difference between her life and that of most girls; of how she was shielded and sheltered, and every thing settled for her; of how free from

all struggles, temptations, excitements, hopes, and fears her existence had always been, and was always likely to be. Before she had begun to dream about her future, that future had shaped itself. She had fancied no fancies, formed to herself no images of lover or husband, and she was to be Mrs. Colonel Dacre!

Is it possible she felt saddened, as by some vague sense of loss? Anyway, that evening for the first time the mellow, pleasant voice which called her name was not entirely welcome. It was as if some new individuality in her, with which it was not in harmony, had been awakened. She slightly shivered as she gathered herself back into herself.

Before she had moved, or had answered Colonel Dacre's call, he had caught the gleam of her light dress, and was springing up the steps and steep paths to her side, in a manner that proved him to be agile, sinewy, and strong as his son might have been, had he had a son.

"I didn't think you would be back quite so soon," Alice said, smiling up into his face.

The sense of not being quite at home in herself, and therefore of being somewhat absent from him, still lingered.

"I think you, Alice, must have been here too long," he answered, smiling down on her with that expression in his eyes which made words of endearment needless. "You look pale, and as if you were cold."

She denied being cold, but the hands she put into his, stretched out to help her to rise, were very cold. He stood still a few moments, gently chafing her hands, having drawn her to lean against him, and gazed out over the wide, deep, wonderful beauty of the time and scene. Then he looked down on the fair creature beside him, looking fairer than even her wont to him in the soft, enchanted light, and sighed out of the sadness that comes to such of us mortals as know a momentary overfullness of satisfaction.

"I hope it is not a very Pagan thing to feel, Alice," he said; "but I seem to long to know that I have a hundred years in which to live and to enjoy it all! It is with a keen pang I remember that I am no longer young." A pause. Alice had pressed her cheek against him as her only answer. Then he went on: "The beauty and gladness of life have got into my head this evening, and I am full of fantastical wishes. I wish for one thing, Alice, I had the power to invent some way by which I could keep you always with me—by diminishing you, for instance, from your majestic proportions to a size that would make it possible to carry you in my breast-pocket. A wish you won't share with me, for it's little liberty you'd get, you fairy, if I had that wish."

The smile was somewhat rueful.

"So you think I like liberty better than to be with you, Lonel?"

"I won't too curiously question the extent of my happiness," he answered; "I will tell you, instead, why I so abruptly disturbed your

twilight reverie, and why I want you now to come to the house. My friends rode back with me. I want you to see them—still more, I want them to see you."

"Your friends!—what friends?—you have so many friends."

"My friends from Greythorpe, Alice. They have come two days earlier than we expected them. When I rode over there this evening, I found them about to start on their way hither."

"Oh! Lonel, I am glad, for I know by your face and your voice how this pleases you."

"Indeed it pleases me—pleases me most deeply. You know something of how strangely strong is my love for young Julian. I feel to-night as if all blessedness, the fulfillment of all my wishes, crowded upon me at once. I am too happy, Alice—too happy."

Again Alice's only answer was a pressure of her cheek against his arm. Then she questioned,

"Am I fit to be seen as I am, Lonel, or must I put my hair tidy first? I don't want your friends to think me very untidy."

"You will do," answered Colonel Dacre, after he had looked at her, and had, with a few light, loving touches, pushed the hair back from a forehead that was of as perfectly unlined a smooth whiteness as any child's.

This hair of Alice's was a trouble to her; it made her, she thought, look more childish than she need otherwise have done. She did not appreciate its peculiar prettiness, and she suffered from the difficulty of keeping it "neat." It was, for texture, more like a baby's hair than a woman's, and it wouldn't grow long. It was so soft, so light, that the least puff of wind would disorder it. It couldn't be "dressed" in any proper conventional fashion, but had to be let lie pretty much according to its own will in pale golden clouds on the fair forehead. Alice envied Grace her long, rich, dark, smooth tresses, which gave her no trouble, and looked always in perfect order. Nevertheless, Alice could not help knowing that Colonel Dacre's "You will do," when he had touched the refractory flakes, meant all manner of praiseful lovingness of admiration. They began their descent toward the house.

"Mrs. Burmender is not here, I suppose?" said Alice.

"Alas! no; she is far worse than I expected, even. Her disease has made terribly rapid progress. It is only the dear old general and young Julian who rode back with me. I must take you to Mrs. Burmender to-morrow, if you will let me."

"Of course I will let you—there, or anywhere," was answered, with soft fervor.

Alice looked up into Colonel Dacre's face presently, as they were descending toward the house. The light of a great, quiet joy overspread it, softened and beautified it. Alice, who had never seen it look exactly like that before, she thought, said,

"I should think any one could tell that y'

love that boy who hears you say 'young Julian,' and who notices how you look when you are thinking of him. I suppose it is, in great part, at all events, because his father, Captain Farquhar, was your best friend?"

"Young Julian is not a boy now, Alice, as you will see, except to an old fellow of my years, who was his father's (his adopted father's) friend. Why I love him you will all understand as soon as you know him—at least, I think so; and you will all, I think, love him, not only for my sake, but also for his own—as I certainly love him, not only for his father's sake, but for his own."

And here, while he was saying this, Colonel Dacre became suddenly aware of a curious sensation—an imperious check or pull at his heart-strings. Question? warning? prophecy? Whatever it was, he pushed it aside, to be attended to, if at all, at some other time. He went on speaking, and spoke a little faster than his habit, and he rather hurried the pace at which they were walking; he also drew Alice's hand closer against him.

"You mustn't let General Burmander frighten you, Alice. He is rather a rough diamond; he speaks loud, and makes noisy jokes; but he is as kind-hearted a creature as it is possible to imagine."

"I sha'n't be frightened, Lonel, by General Burmander, or by any body, if I am near you."

But Alice's hand tightened her hold of his arm, as they got close to the house, for, in truth, Alice felt nervous. When they were quite close, she whispered,

"They don't know, do they, Lonel?"

"Know what?" Something in her softly blushing face answered him. "No, darling, they don't know, not yet, how happy I am! But, Alice, they will soon find out." And it was Colonel Dacre's turn to feel slightly nervous, in anticipation of the general's banter.

"I'm glad they don't know," said Alice.

"Why are you glad?"

"Because it makes it of so much less consequence what they think of me, and so I sha'n't feel so shy."

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL DACRE'S FRIENDS.

"Wonder not that I call a man so young my friend: His worth is great: valiant he is, and temperate; And one that never thinks his life his own, If his friend need it."

COLONEL DACRE, leaving Alice with Olivia and Grace in the drawing-room, went in search of his friends, who had not yet entered the house, but had gone round to one of the paddocks to look at a horse of which Colonel Dacre had been speaking. When he returned *with them, before he had had time to go through any form of introduction, General Burmander, a red-faced, white-haired, white-mustached,*

cheery blue-eyed and hearty loud-voiced old gentleman, exclaimed,

"Why, hang it, Dacre, what a sly dog you are! We thought, Julian here and I—at least, I thought, and, if he knew better, he never told me—that we were coming into barrack bachelor-quarters, and here we are, taken by storm, youth and beauty and fashion charging us at a disadvantage! 'Pon my life, it isn't fair! And how a man blessed with such a wife and such daughters could refrain from boasting a little of his wealth, I can't understand. I always knew you were one of the quiet and deep ones, but—eh, Julian, what's the matter? Blundering as usual, am I? Why didn't you put me right in time, then? Well, Dacre, explain yourself. No need to blush, man. Introduce me—introduce me!"

"That is just what I am waiting to do, general. As to blushing, that's not much in my line." But, nevertheless, the bronze of Colonel Dacre's face was a little more ruddy than usual. "Let me," he then proceeded, "have the pleasure of presenting my old friend, General Burmander, to my sister, the 'Olivia' of whom, I am sure, you have often heard me speak; to my niece Grace, Miss Dunn; and to my sister's adopted daughter, Miss Alice Fairfax, the 'little Alice' of whom, I am also sure, you have heard."

Then, his hand grasping Julian's shoulder, Colonel Dacre went through the same ceremony of introduction with Julian; who, by two of the ladies, at all events, was received more in accordance with what they knew to be Colonel Dacre's affection for him than with his own claims as a stranger.

Olivia straightway fell in love with young Mr. Farquhar. This white-haired Olivia was far more susceptible and tender of heart than the dark-haired woman of many years ago had been. It was little Alice who had changed and softened Olivia. The child's worshipful love for Olivia had stimulated Olivia to starve her faults and to nourish her virtues, that she might be something less unlike what "the child" loved her as being. There was something, Olivia thought, very winning in the appearance, but still more in the manner, of this dark loving-eyed, broad white-browed, gentle, but deep-voiced, tall, slight, rather boyish-looking "young Julian;" something, too, which appealed to the motherliness in her, reminding her of what her Walter had been at the same age—her Walter, whom she had loved for his dead mother, as well as for herself. And this lad, too (so white-haired Olivia called him), was fatherless and motherless, as her Walter had been. Even had he had no charm of face and no fascination of manner, Olivia's heart would probably have warmed to him, and he had both.

Before they had talked together a quarter of an hour, Olivia's captivation was complete. They talked exclusively of her brother; and the earnest tones of Julian's voice, and the fire

that woke in the slumbrous depths of his eyes as he spoke, each word of speech being praise of Colonel Dacre, made Olivia's liking for the speaker rapidly change to love.

Alice was close to Olivia's side, listening. Grace was talking with General Burmander and her uncle, and pouring out coffee, at another part of the room. Young Julian chiefly noticed Alice to remark how her ethereal infantine bloom, about which the spring twilight, that was being prolonged by moonlight, seemed to linger, threw into stronger relief, by contrast, Miss Dacre's curiously-interesting face, whose clear Spanish darkness (in which shone those inspired-looking eyes, and that youthfully and most rarely beautiful mouth), so strangely crowned and framed by the abundance of silken silvery hair, struck him as more remarkable than any thing he had ever seen either in life or on canvas.

Before they had talked together ten minutes, young Mr. Farquhar had felt in Olivia enough likeness to her brother to make him love her and wish for her love. Toward Grace, who, as she dispensed the coffee, complacently accepted, and with dignified playfulness returned, the rather heavy badinage of the rough, good-humored old general, Julian now and then sent a glance of worshipful admiration; while Grace, after her first investigating scrutiny of "the boy Uncle Walter makes such a fuss about," having superciliously decided that he was just "an elegant little dandy," with nothing in him, vouchsafed him no further notice.

"Now, young sir," by-and-by shouted the general, in a voice to be heard by a regiment, "we must be going. Marian, you know," was added, with a significant softening of the voice, "will be sitting up till we come home; and she's by no means over her journey yet, poor soul!"

When Colonel Dacre returned to the drawing-room, after having seen his friends ride off, it was in a clear, glad voice that his "Well?" challenged expression of opinion concerning them. And yet, as he had paused a moment or two at his gates, in the sweet-brier and honeysuckle fragrance of the moony May night, watching them along the road, that same imperious pull at his heart-strings, of question, warning, or prophecy, had made itself felt.

The room, in which no windows had been shut and no lights kindled, was almost as flower-fragrant as the night outside. Colonel Dacre gravitated by instinct to where, in her light dress, almost invisible against the white curtains, Alice stood; he put his arm round her, and gathered her closer than it was his wont to do. He continued to hold her against his heart, as a talisman, a charm against that imperious and mysterious warning.

"Well?" came again from Colonel Dacre.

Alice said nothing. Some vague wonder at some difference in him, something to be felt, not understood, held her quiet and breathless feeling within his arm. Olivia spoke:

"He reminds me of what you were at his age, Walter. I need say no more than that. You know what that means."

Grace had more to say, praising General Burmander, but speaking of "that young Mr. Farquhar" in a spirit that made Colonel Dacre's brows contract with displeased wonder and his voice sound almost severe.

"If I am not mistaken, you didn't once speak to Mr. Farquhar?"

"Oh! yes, indeed I did, uncle. I asked him to take some coffee, and he informed me, in the most confidential manner, that he never took coffee, which of course it was most deeply interesting to me to know."

Grace spoke with exceeding pertness.

"Well," said Colonel Dacre, "had I not noticed that Julian looked at you with very decided admiration, and would gladly have availed himself of any opportunity you had chosen to give him of improving your acquaintance, I should have supposed that some imagined slight of his had given the acrid accent to your remarks. As it is, I excuse you on the ground that as Julian Farquhar is as unlike Tom Blatchford as it's possible for two fine and nice young fellows to be, you can not be expected to admire him."

"As if that had any thing to do with it, Uncle Walter!" said Grace, with a toss. "I'm not such a goose as to require all men to be like Tom; neither am I, as you know, so contented with Tom as to be likely to be such a goose."

"I can hardly think it is because young Julian is dear to me, Grace, that you have set yourself to sneer at him. Where, then, am I to look for a reason? Your aunt Olivia talked with pleasure and interest to young Mr. Farquhar. How am I to account for your speaking of him as if he were beneath your notice?"

"To what fool wouldn't Aunt Olivia talk or listen with pleasure and interest, while the talk was about you, was praise of you, Uncle Walter?"

"There's something in that, certainly," laughed Colonel Dacre. "But not any thing appropriate in this case. My young friend is as far as possible from being a fool—on the contrary, he is as richly gifted intellectually as physically. You can't deny that he is a handsome fellow, I suppose, Grace?"

"Delightfully 'interesting-looking,'" said Grace; "but I have a special aversion to interesting-looking young men, though they are popularly supposed to be particularly fascinating."

"You mean that you think him effeminate. He is the bravest fellow I know! and I have seen him, he not being a soldier, exposed to danger, under circumstances to try the cool courage of the toughest old soldier, and neither blench nor falter. He is a hero every inch of him, God bless him! Then he is the most unselfish fellow, and the most affectionate imaginable. He once nursed me through a

ver—Olivia knows about it—as I should have thought only a woman who loved me could have done.” Involuntarily his arm pressed Alice a little closer as he said, “A woman who loved me.”

“I can only say, Uncle Walter, that he should be your own brother, or your son, if he is what you describe him.”

“Ah, Miss Grace, you think to stop my mouth by flattery—but I have not done! I choose to tell you a little more of my young Julian, whom, for some inscrutable reason, you choose to depreciate. He is the most graceful and the most fearless rider I know, one of the best of shots. You should have seen him on a tiger-hunt to understand what his nerves are worth. He is something of an artist, something of a musician, to my judgment altogether a poet. And of music, painting, and poetry he is considered, for his years, an acute critic.”

“An infant Prodigy! or an Admirable Crichton!” Grace said, calmly, with as close an approach to a sneer as her affectionate respect to her uncle permitted her to be capable of. “To my mind, uncle, you have indeed condemned him. ‘Jack of all trades, and master of none,’ would be a vulgar, but, I expect, a just way of describing him. I really can’t imagine how you can have become so infatuated about such a manikin.”

“Grace, I really am ashamed of you,” said her aunt. “You let your temper—for temper is at the bottom of it—lead you too far. If you were a few years younger, I should just send you to bed.”

“Where I am wishing myself,” said Grace, veiling with her hand a real or an imaginary yawn.

“If I have said any thing about Julian to give the idea of a *petit maitre*, or, as Grace says, manikin, I have done him great injustice and misled you. No doubt he has his faults, and he is too young for either faults or virtues to have fully developed. But it is certain that he is one of those peculiarly gifted beings, of whom there are a few, in whom all grace and all goodness seem natural, and who succeed in all they undertake.”

“Any one who loved you well enough to understand you, Walter—I, for instance—might have spoken just so of you when you were the same age.”

“Alas! then, for the difference between promise and performance,” commented Colonel Dacre, with a humorous shrug.

Alice, emboldened by the duskness, and touched in a way she did not understand by something in his tone, turned her face from looking out, and bent her head down and kissed his hand.

“And when,” Grace asked, “am I to see

this Phoenix again? I will observe him more carefully, and try to get over his elegant appearance, and to do him less injustice.”

“Julian will come and stay here by-and-by, as soon as Mrs. Burmander is better.”

“What is he to the Burmanders, or they to him?”

“There is no relationship, except such as one might call conferred adoption.”

“What a mysterious phrase! Pray, what may it mean, Uncle Walter?”

“It means that, on the sudden death in action of Captain Farquhar, whose adopted son Julian was, the Burmanders became the boy’s guardians.”

“He was only Captain Farquhar’s adopted son! His relation, though, of course, having the same name. What puzzles me is—”

“Enough questioning now, Grace. You have not behaved so amiably that I should feel bound to gratify all your curiosity.”

“That is true, uncle. Well, I can only say that, if there is some mystery about young Mr. Farquhar, this gives him the finishing touch of perfection, viewed from the point of fitness to be a hero of romance. Not one of the burly, boisterous, if you please, brutal type of heroes, but one of the interesting, elegant, languishing sort.”

“I have not said there was any mystery, young lady; I merely assert that I am not in the humor to submit to more cross-questioning.”

“And I know what that means. Good-night, Uncle Walter.”

“Good-night, Grace. For Mr. Blatchford’s sake, I hope you may be in a sweeter humor to-morrow.”

Grace left the room. Olivia followed her to say,

“I wonder, Grace, what pleasure it can have given you to try to pain my brother by disparaging what he loves, and loves to hear praised.”

“I wonder too, Aunt Olivia, and can only hope I won’t do so another time.”

Meanwhile Colonel Dacre bade Alice good-night. He held her against his breast, he kissed her forehead, her mouth, her eyes, and then, when he let her go from his arms, her hands. There was something so different in this “good-night” from their usual good-nights, that Alice’s wonder grew to trouble. She was flushed and agitated when she got to her own room, and that night it was long before she could sleep; and when she slept, she had strange dreams—of love, and loss, and grief.

The lights were burning in Colonel Dacre’s room, and he was walking to and fro in it great part of that night—walking to and fro, with head bent down like a man in profound meditation.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. BURMANDER.

"In a noble lady

Softness of spirit, and a sober nature,
That moves like summer winds, cool, and blows
sweetness,
Shows blessed, like herself."

GREYTHORPE, the house Colonel Dacre had taken for his friends, who had wished to spend this summer in his neighborhood, was within a pleasant ride or drive from Heatherstone.

"No use to buy any place," General Burmander had written, "for it's impossible to know whether the air may suit Marian; in fact, so far north as you are, it's certain to be too cold for her in winter."

So he had written, and so he repeated in his cheery, blustering voice, though he not only knew, but knew that those to whom he spoke knew that he knew, that, in all probability, before winter his Marian would be beyond the reach of all earthly cold or heat.

The day after the general and Julian Farquhar had been at Heatherstone, Colonel Dacre asked Alice to ride with him to Greythorpe in the afternoon. Olivia and Grace would wait to hear that the invalid was a little stronger before they called; but Colonel Dacre, between whom and Mrs. Burmander there was an affectionate attachment of long standing, had an uneasy restlessness, which he did not explain to himself, upon him, and which led him to be impatient that Alice and Mrs. Burmander should be known to each other. He proposed to leave Alice with the sick lady for the afternoon, while he rode over to Monkstowe, where he had business, with the general. That Alice could tire her—that Alice could do any thing but good to any body—did not occur to him.

Alice, always timid with strangers, was secretly alarmed at this proposed arrangement; but she was a very meek and docile little lady as yet, and seldom, if ever, thought of refusing to fall in with any wish of Colonel Dacre's, or even of asking him to modify any plan. His will was law for her as yet. "As yet!" But we may parody the proverb of the ancients, and say, "Let no woman's temper be pronounced good till she die." As yet, what had Alice ever had to try her? She was a petted white dove, whose feathers no wind had been suffered to ruffle.

In spite of her timidity, Alice was very happy to-day. The ride to Greythorpe was a very happy one. Colonel Dacre talked to her in the way she loved him to talk, telling her of the things that interested him, serious things, explaining to her his political opinions, and describing to her his plans for the improvement of the dwellings, and for the better education of the children of his poor neighbors, quietly, by implication, associating her with all his schemes for good work in the future. Alice quite forgot any perplexing impression left from

yesterday. Alice always felt proud and pleased when Colonel Dacre talked to her as he did to-day—as he might have talked to Olivia—as to a woman who could understand and even help him, whom he thought worthy to be his companion, his friend—as something more than little Alice, the mere child, whom he loved far too much.

Colonel Dacre should have been encouraged to talk to Alice in this way by the soft earnestness of her listening face, and by the sympathetic intelligence of her few comments and questions, confirming what Olivia often said about her, that she was thoughtful and sensible beyond her years. Yes, that ride was a very happy ride—that was not surprising. But what did surprise Alice was that the afternoon, when she was left with Mrs. Burmander, was also a happy afternoon. She had not been five minutes with the sick lady before she forgot her usual timidity, and felt at home, and lovingly anxious to be of use.

Mrs. Burmander was a good deal younger than her husband, and yet her feeling for him was in many respects more like a mother's than a wife's. She loved him with a pitying, protecting sort of love. The thought of his helpless, lonely grief, when she should be taken, was the bitterness of death for her. She was a truly religious, a spiritual-minded woman, for whom death had no other bitterness and no terror; not that she desired it, for, in spite of her constant and frequently severe suffering, the love of those who loved her, and the beauty of the world, made life dear. The expression of sweet patience and quiet endurance made her face beautiful, with a sort of beauty that immediately drew Alice toward her.

From three o'clock till nearly five Alice and Mrs. Burmander were left undisturbedly together; then Mr. Farquhar came into the room where they were, bringing with him two or three very perfect early roses, which he had just gathered from the garden, and, on a plate of green leaves, a few strawberries from the forcing-house.

"Those roses should be for my little friend—one of them, at least—this just blush-tinted white bud," said Mrs. Burmander.

Julian offered it to Alice with the sweet-natured but condescending smile he might have had for a child. He thought of Alice as "a little girl" to be patronized.

"Please let it stay with the others. It is so lovely, and it would die before I got home," Alice said.

With another smile Julian took it back. He put the roses in a little vase, which he filled at a small fountain on the lawn outside; this, and the strawberries on their plate of green leaves, he set on a tiny table which he brought close to Mrs. Burmander's sofa; then, bending over Mrs. Burmander, with the gentlest of voices, the most loving of looks, Julian softly laid his hand on her forehead.

"It is hot, Nantie; you are tired. I as

afraid you have been talking too much. You must rest now, and let me try and entertain Miss Fairfax. Let me lower your couch, and move your pillows. Only yesterday you said I understood better than any body else how to make your position easy."

"That is quite true, dear boy. I shall be glad you should move me now. If I am tired, however, it is only with pleasure. My little new friend has been most sweet and good to me. Perhaps she has revived a little my old, old longing to have a daughter of my own." Then, as she sank back upon the re-arranged pillows, closed her eyes and folded her hands, as if for sleep or prayer, she added, in an only just audible voice, "However, soon I shall have rest from all vain longings and all pain—so I trust, at least, through God's love and for Christ's sake."

Possibly Grace would have found fresh ground for scoffing at Julian, had she been witness of the girl-like, deft aptitude (to the aid of which, however, came masculine strength, as he supported the sick woman with one arm while the other re-arranged her pillows) of his tendance of Mrs. Burmander. Not so Alice; she neither scoffed, admired, nor wondered, just accepted all she saw as simply natural.

"Now, Miss Fairfax," said Julian, standing in front of her, smiling down on her, "you and I will amuse each other while she rests. Do you know the gardens here? May I have the pleasure of taking you round them? They are very charming in their way, though not so delightful as Heatherstone."

"Don't run off with her, Julian," pleaded a faint voice from the sofa. "I shall like to listen while you two talk."

Julian, on this, seated himself on a low chair near Alice, who, shy little soul, shrank back a little, as he bent forward, leaned his elbow on his knee, pushed the dark hair back from that smooth, broad, white forehead of his, and evidently wondered what there could be for them to talk about. Alice began, saying penitently, almost in a whisper,

"I am so very sorry if I have tired Mrs. Burmander."

"She is weaker than usual just now, not having yet got over the fatigue of her long journey. She is accustomed, too, to be so very quiet—quite too much alone. But I am sure your society will be a great pleasure to her. I can see that it has been so to-day, though she is overtired now."

"Another time I will be very careful. Of course, to-day I did not know."

"Of course you did not." He assented, with re-assuring patronage, and rather absently. His eyes were fixed on that pale, worn face which, now the lids were closed, looked so death-like. "By-the-bye," he added with more animation, "has her maid brought her *any thing this afternoon? wine or tea? Mark—rather forgetful.*"

"She has had nothing since I have been here," Alice answered.

"Ah! that is why I am unusually tired," Mrs. Burmander said, opening her eyes. "They have forgotten to bring me any tea. I am wanting my tea."

"It is very careless of Marker to forget." That it would not be pleasant to displease Mr. Farquhar was a thought which occurred to Alice as he rose to ring the bell.

Marker came.

"You have forgotten your mistress's tea; she is exhausted by the want of it," was said in a tone of cold gentleness, through which the woman was intensely conscious of reproof.

Her face flushed all over with self-vexation.

"I am sorry!" was all she said. And she repeated, "I am sorry!" when, some ten minutes after, she re-appeared with the tray.

Julian then gave her a kind word, which brought the tears into her eyes, and sent her away more than ever determined never again to be so careless. It was Mr. Farquhar who poured out the tea and waited upon Mrs. Burmander and Alice, raising the invalid's couch again, not omitting any possible service.

Mrs. Burmander said to Alice,

"I'm sure, little friend, you must think it ungrateful of me to wish for a daughter, when I have in Mr. Farquhar son and daughter in one. But I have not always had him."

Julian acknowledged this loving speech by two or three gentle touches on the soft brown hair, which should have been gray, but that it was of a shade of color which often remains unchanged till very late in life.

After having taken her tea, Mrs. Burmander seemed to revive, and to be inclined to chat again.

"And you, little Alice," she said; "forgive me, dear child, but that is how I have chiefly heard you spoken of, and I have heard you spoken of a good deal—you, like Julian, have never known father or mother."

"I have never felt the want of a mother," Alice answered, with soft fervor, thinking gratefully of the, if possible, more than mother's love she had received from Olivia.

"Nor, I am sure, of a father," Mrs. Burmander said; "except that Colonel Dacre has been so little at home. There is a fund of tenderness in his nature that would make him a most loving father to such a dear little, gentle thing as you." She turned to Julian, without waiting for any answer from Alice, and added, "Do you know, Julian, I sometimes fancy there must be a considerable likeness between you and Colonel Dacre—so often I am reminded of him by you, or by you of him."

Julian was occupied in wondering what it was in Mrs. Burmander's first words that had made Alice blush so overpoweringly, and it was easy to see, for the tears had come into her eyes so painfully. While this wonder still occupied him, though some minutes and some further talk had passed, the general and Col-

onel Dacre returned. They were all for a few minutes, but only very few, round the invalid couch. Julian gravely watched the encounter of eyes and of smiles between Alice and the colonel. A new idea about them had entered Julian's head. He pronounced it absurd, quite too absurd, and yet couldn't shake it off. It made him grave, for it gravely displeased him.

"Kiss me, little Alice, and come again very soon," the sick woman said at parting. "You will bring your dear child again very soon, won't you?" she added, appealingly, to Colonel Dacre.

"I can not promise to bring her very soon, dear friend; but no doubt she will come. I find I must go to town to-morrow, and I may be detained some days."

Julian noticed Alice's look of startled surprise, and the peculiar expression by which Colonel Dacre answered it, explaining,

"I didn't know this myself, Alice, till I got to Monkstowé. I will tell you all about it as we ride home."

Nothing escaped the grave notice of Julian's eyes. His watch was a pained and jealous one. The idea which was gaining ground with him displeased him, because it seemed unworthy of Colonel Dacre. "In love!" "At his age!" "And with such a child!" Julian was roused by hearing Colonel Dacre say,

"I can see that Julian is thinking we ought to go—that we are overtiring you." And Colonel Dacre bent over and kissed the shadowy hand held out to him.

Julian went with Alice and Colonel Dacre to the door. He watched the colonel mount Alice, not offering to help, except by his hand on her horse's rein; and he was satisfied of the truth of his suspicion.

"Have you been quarreling with Julian Farquhar, Alice? I don't know when I have seen him look so gloomy," Colonel Dacre asked, as soon as they were out of hearing.

"No, indeed, he has been most pleasant and kind. But now, Lonel, tell me—"

They rode, till they were out of sight, in evidently earnest talk, and neither of them looked back to where Julian stood watching, with that ordinarily so bright broad brow strangely overclouded.

"Yet what is it to me?" he said, in self-remembrance. "I suppose he thinks it a good provision for the child. Perhaps he doesn't think of himself at all—which would be just like him. And yet it seems to me he loves her."

Julian was feeling, whether he knew it or not, as a son feels who fears his father is about, according to his views, "to make a fool of himself," to throw himself away.

"Loves her! loves that little childish, undeveloped creature! He, who has gone through life without loving, and whose large and noble nature I should have said would have been so hard to satisfy! What can he hope from her of sympathy or companionship? No doubt she is an interesting girl—interesting in the

way of promise, as a child is; but while he waits for her spring to change to summer, he will have winter upon him."

Julian took a meditative, melancholy stroll among the lawns and shrubberies before he went in to dress for dinner, and came to the knowledge of the fact that his grief, annoyance, distaste, whatever it might be called, was not unselfish. They had been so much to each other; they had looked forward to being, in the years to come, still more; and now it seemed to Julian that this girl-wife must push him from his friend's hearth and heart. It was a shock to him, a something incongruous and out of harmony, something that made him knit his brows each time the thought of it recurred.

Meanwhile, General Burmander had seated himself on a low seat by his wife's couch. Holding her hand in his, quite cautiously, lest he should damage so frail a thing, he talked to her of the afternoon, repeating any detail he thought likely to interest her. He spoke in the curious, hoarse, uncertain tones his poor rough voice took when he tried to speak softly.

He thought her looking better to-day, and so dared sit beside her; sometimes he could not trust himself alone with her. He had been specially warned against agitation, as likely to shorten her life, and there were times when some expression of her face or some tone of her voice would oblige him to leave her side precipitately, so overwhelming would be the impulse to bury his white head in her gown, and to cry like a broken-hearted child.

"Poor Dacre!" the general by-and-by said, after a short silence, when he had pretty well exhausted the incidents of the afternoon—"poor Dacre!"

"Why do you say that, Laurence? I thought I had never seen our friend look either so happy, or so handsome, or so well, as he looked this afternoon."

"But how long will it last, Marian? He's in a fool's paradise; but how soon will he be turned out?"

"How long will it last? What do you mean, Laurence?"

"You don't mean to say you haven't found out what my bat's eyes have discovered? You don't mean to say you don't know what it is makes me say 'Poor Dacre!' every time the thought of the man's happy face crosses me?"

"No, dear, indeed I don't."

"Why, Marian, the fellow's in love with that little girl."

"With little Alice?"

"Yes—a child young Julian treats as if she should still be in the nursery."

"Are you sure, Laurence?"

"God help him! yes."

The dressing-bell rang, and the general, after stooping over and kissing the delicate roses of the soft old cheek, went away.

"She's better to-day! I'm sure she's better to-day," he assured himself.

Mrs. Burmander pondered; and with

Burmander. pondering and praying were not often far apart.

Mrs. Burmander did not think of the matter quite in the same spirit as did her husband and young Julian. Alice did not seem to her such a mere child. They had had a good deal of talk in the hour or two they were together. Mrs. Burmander had drawn Alice out—she knew that in mind and heart she was not a mere child, but had sense and thought and feeling beyond any thing that could be called childish. That Alice should love Colonel Dacre with love did not seem improbable to Mrs. Burmander. She knew that to a very young girl the notion of being loved by a man no longer young, and of world-wide experiences, sometimes has a subtly flattering attractiveness; and Colonel Dacre was a man of whose love any girl or woman might be proud, and would be proud, thought Mrs. Burmander, in proportion as she was worthy of it. That Alice should love Colonel Dacre did not, therefore, seem difficult of belief to Mrs. Burmander. As to the prospects of happiness for Colonel Dacre, if his heart were in those small hands of Alice's, she reserved judgment; but she was by no means inclined to despair, or to think meanly of them. And she could enter into the charm that Alice's mere and absolute innocence, her snow-drop white purity, must have for one who, like Colonel Dacre, had unavoidably seen much of world-worn, world-soiled women.

Mrs. Burmander said, "My poor friend," recognizing the frailty of the little bark he had freighted with all his hopes of happiness; but she believed it possible the little bark might prove brave and true, and bear its freight safely. She prayed this might prove so.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW INFLUENCE.

"Herz, mein Herz, was soll das geben?
Was bedrängt dich so sehr?
Welch ein fremdes neues Leben!
Ich erkenne dich nicht mehr."

COLONEL DACRE was detained in London almost as many weeks as he had expected to be days. His business was connected with the philanthropic schemes in which he had interested Alice, and every evening, however late or tired he was, he wrote to Alice a full history of the day's progress or delays.

Perhaps most girls in Alice's circumstances would have been disappointed in these letters, for those reasons which made Alice especially value them. In his occupation with the things written about, the writer seemed to lose sight of any other fact with regard to the person written to than that of the kindred interest in the subject. Except for a few words here and there, these letters might have been written to *Olivia*, and for this, rather than for the few words that could have been only her

own, strange little Alice prized and was proud of these letters; as, indeed, at this time she prized and was proud of all recognition of her "grown-up" womanhood. For, no longer feeling a child—in fact, probably feeling older than she would do a few years hence—Alice sometimes suffered a little, not in her dignity, but in some indefinite sensitiveness, from being treated too much like a child. Her habit of diffident silence often placed her at a disadvantage, and, combined with her milk-white fairness, the simplicity of her coiffure, and the fragility of her frame, to cause her to be often addressed in a tone of fond, petting cajolery only fit to be used to a child.

After that first visit to Greythorpe it came about naturally that Alice, especially during Colonel Dacre's absence from home, was a good deal with Mrs. Burmander. Two or three times a week, at least, she spent the afternoon by the sick lady's sofa, sometimes in the garden, sometimes in the pretty sitting-room that opened upon the garden. Sometimes Olivia took her, and left her there while she went on into Monkestowe. Sometimes the general fetched her.

Grace did not "take to" Mrs. Burmander; she kept out of the circle of her influence, and rather sat in judgment on all she heard of her. At first she had, for politeness' sake, now and then accompanied Miss Dacre and Alice when they went to Greythorpe. But she remained graciously formal, serenely repellent, baffling Mrs. Burmander's gentle endeavor to draw her toward herself. She would have found it difficult to explain why, but at Greythorpe Grace felt entirely out of her element, and in an uncongenial atmosphere. She therefore decided that the atmosphere there was morbid; that Mrs. Burmander was a sentimentalist, who took overstrained, unreal views of things, and from whom she, Grace Dunn, a healthy-minded, practical, sensible young woman, did well to hold aloof. Grace had good feeling enough to abstain from ridiculing young Mr. Farquhar's tender devotion to his dying friend, but it was not to her taste, it was girlish (in Grace's mouth a very contemptuous phrase); if she had spoken out the thought of her heart, she would have pronounced it "mawkish."

So, "nobody wants me there, and I don't care to go there," came to be Grace's answer when a visit to Greythorpe was proposed; although Olivia assured her she had certainly one profound admirer in that house.

Miss Dacre had noticed Mr. Farquhar's devout observance of Grace, whom he credited with all kind of ideal perfection, and whose stately, womanly majesty of manner and of movement awed him with a sense of his own slight boyish worthlessness; while toward Alice he preserved the protecting and patronizing air of an "elder and better."

Julian and Alice were both too young to feel the charm of each other's youth, though, no doubt, after a time, it helped to draw them to-

gether—to set them at ease one with the other, giving, for a time, the equal, playmate sort of feeling.

Alice was strangely happy during those hours she spent alone with Mrs. Burmander, happy and sad. They were emotional hours; hours when the hidden secrets of life and of the heart seemed drawn toward the surface. Mrs. Burmander spoke much and familiarly of the approach of death. It seemed to be to her a relief and satisfaction to have some one to whom she dared speak, without fear of producing painful agitation, of what was always occupying her thoughts. She had such a serene and untroubled faith as few of us attain and hold on to. For her it seemed as if in the hour of death there could be no terror, because no possibility of sinking beyond the consciousness of God's present love. Alice was profoundly and intensely influenced and affected by all she heard; her soul grew and developed during those hours by the sick lady's couch, and her religious life became more vivid and tangible.

Once or twice young Mr. Farquhar, breaking in upon these conferences, surprised the soul, as it were, in Alice's face, and wondered.

Julian would not be altogether banished for long from his friend's side, even when Alice was there. He had been so accustomed for the last two years, ever since the fatal turn of her illness, to spend much time with her, talking to her, reading to her, playing to her, writing notes for her, rendering almost all the services a loving and devoted daughter might have rendered, that now, when, in all probability, the time was short in which he would be able to do any thing for her, he was jealous of interference with the monopoly of his privileges. Even when Alice was there, the accustomed reading often went on.

"It keeps her from talking too much," Julian said, confidentially, and half-apologetically, to Alice. He did not seem to notice how much they talked, he and Mrs. Burmander, about what he read.

Sometimes the reading was from the New Testament, or some favorite passage in the Old. Sometimes it was from Shakspeare, or from some modern poet. And when, afterward, they talked about what had been read, the two gentle, subdued voices, one richly mellow, the other soft and silvery, made subtly penetrating music in Alice's heart. In this manner she came to know more of Julian's inner life and nature than she might have learned in many months in any other fashion. Alice herself was almost always entirely silent, but she was not allowed to feel shut out. Mrs. Burmander would always have her sit close, where she could hold her hand.

It happened to Julian one day to be absolutely startled by the intensity and intelligence he found in Alice's fair face, on which his eyes, lifted from what he was reading, had fallen, quite without intention, just as they might have fallen on the place she filled had it been empty. After that he unconsciously acquired a habit of

watching for the recurrence of some such expression; but after that Alice's lashes dropped, and soft color rose in her face when he glanced toward her, and he never saw that look again; at least, not till long after, and in quite different circumstances.

With Alice, as she sat and listened to these readings and these talks, it was something as it had been in the May twilight that evening, when she had just ended her poem; a curious straining toward something, an impalpable, unattainable something, which should be at once the meaning and the essence of all truth and beauty—a something that ever, as she seemed about to touch it, floated from her into infinity.

And Alice generally returned to Heatherstone from these visits feeling strangely sad, happy, restless, at peace; in short, all in a tremor and vibration of soft, subdued excitement.

And why?

CHAPTER V.

AT THE BREAKFAST-TABLE.

"Is it not strange that every woman's will
Should track out new ways to disturb herself?
That peevishness
And anger, not to have the power to do
Things unexpected, carries them away
To their own ruin?"

JULIAN's promised visit to Heatherstone was the subject of conversation at the breakfast-table there on the first morning after Colonel Dacre's return from London. Alice believed he would not come, would not leave Mrs. Burmander; but she said nothing, not wishing to forestall Colonel Dacre's disappointment, if he had to be disappointed. He spoke of it confidently as a settled matter, saying,

"I know, Olivia, I may rely on you to do all in your power to make Julian's visit pleasant to him. I say the same to Alice." The smile that went with the naming of Alice's name made the saying of it a caress. "I suppose, Grace, I can only hope from you, that you won't do any thing to make it unpleasant."

"If I were Alice, Uncle Walter, I should be quite inclined to be jealous of your affection for Mr. Farquhar!"

"If I were Tom, Grace," broke in Miss Dacre, mischievously, "I should be inclined to be jealous of the admiring looks directed toward you at every opportunity by this same Mr. Farquhar. I think your engagement should be made known before Mr. Blatchford and Mr. Farquhar meet. You are sailing under false colors at present."

"Mine is not the only engagement that should be made known! I am not the only person sailing under false colors!" answered Grace. Colonel Dacre looked disturbed and keenly inquiring, but Grace reassured him, as unintentionally as she had disturbed him, adding, saucily, "It would be only humane of Us

cle Walter to save the ladies of this neighborhood the trouble of vainly spreading nets for 'that handsome, interesting Colonel Dacre,' as I have heard him called more than once by those who have hoped I would repeat their words to him."

"All in good time, Grace."

"As to my engagement," continued Grace, assuming an air of supreme indifference, as she gave earnest attention to the equal spreading of the butter on her toast, "I really am not quite sure it still exists. It is some days since I last saw Mr. Blatchford, and my last words to him were to tell him that I thought every thing between us had better come to an end."

"Words you did not, I am sure, this time any more than on any former occasion, wish him to act upon."

"Indeed, uncle, I have quite made up my mind that I will die an old maid sooner than marry a man who leads so ill-regulated a life. Tom doesn't show the slightest disposition to conform to my wishes. I have never known him wilder, nor heard more queer stories about him, than during the last few months." Some quizzical expression in Colonel Dacre's eyes making Grace feel malicious, she went on to say, "As to your little pet, Mr. Farquhar, he is quite welcome to admire me if he pleases. The admiration of such a boy can be nothing to me, nor, foolish as Tom is, could he be foolish enough to be jealous of Mr. Farquhar!"

"That is an exceedingly ridiculous speech, Grace!" There was an angry sparkle in Colonel Dacre's eyes as he said this. "Julian is no 'boy;' he is in years some few older than you are, and in cultivation, in knowledge of the world, and in experience of life, he is much your superior. As to his being 'little,' he is considerably above the middle height—as tall, though, perhaps, not quite so broad and stout as your Tom, who is undeniably a fine fellow."

"All the same there is a 'small' effect about him."

"Excuse me, Grace, if I tell you that something lately is very much spoiling your temper. In the course of the day I should like to have a little serious talk with you, to ask you a few questions. Afterward I will have an interview with Mr. Blatchford. It seems to me, my dear girl, that you are mismanaging your own affairs, and running considerable danger of spoiling all your chances of happiness. I have interfered with you very little hitherto, Grace, because I did not think you far wrong in your own opinion of yourself, as a sensible young woman. But it seems to me that the time is come when I must assert my authority as your guardian."

Alice turned quite pale for Grace. Grace turned rather pale for herself. Colonel Dacre looked resolute, and spoke resolutely. But Grace answered,

"I shall be very happy to hear any thing *you have to say, Uncle Walter, and to answer*
—uns I am able to answer. But if I

am mismanaging my own affairs, I am afraid it will not be in your power to improve them. The state of the case is just this: we parted in great anger on both sides, as, I believe, righteous anger on mine, some days since, and I have not seen Mr. Blatchford from that time."

"And you have repented, Grace, of your righteous anger?"

"By no means. I certainly have not repented. I would repeat to Tom now what I told him then, that I consider his behavior to be often of such a kind as to make it all but impossible that any girl with proper self-respect should allow her name to be associated with his."

"In spite of that saving 'all but,' it seems to me that, unless you know of things which I have not heard even hinted, you speak with a monstrous sort of exaggeration of Tom's faults or foibles, for which only angry jealousy could possibly account."

"Jealousy!" interrupted Grace, with an angry flush and toss of her head—"I could never condescend to be jealous. Jealousy is a thing I don't understand. If a man gave me cause for jealousy, I shouldn't be jealous—I should simply not care any thing more about him."

Without noticing this interruption, Colonel Dacre continued, not quite without hidden malice,

"Tom Blatchford may not be, like Julian Farquhar, a highly-refined and cultivated gentleman, whose intellect and taste would alone suffice to keep him from verging on low dissipation; but he is, at all events, a manly, honest, honorable fellow, most unlikely to be mixed up in any thing disgraceful. He is—"

"Worth a thousand of your finikin fine Julian," broke passionately from poor Grace. Then she flushed again, so hotly this time that her eyes filled with tears; and flashing a defiant glance against the involuntary smiles of Olivia and of Alice, exclaimed, "You are all in league against me! you are all most cruel!" and burst out crying.

Such an outbreak of temper and feeling was very rare in Grace. Alice got up, put her arms round her, and kissed her, whispering,

"Dear Grace, we didn't mean to pain you. Don't think we are cruel. I couldn't help smiling, for I was so glad to hear you speak up in that way for Mr. Blatchford. We all love you dearly—you know we do."

But Grace put Alice's arms away, and left the room; just what Colonel Dacre, in his masculine distaste for "a scene," had been about to do.

"I often wonder how it will end," said Olivia.

"If I were Tom, I should be tempted to end it summarily—to run away with Grace, and marry her against her will. In my capacity of guardian, I can hardly recommend this, can I, Olivia?"

"You certainly can not."

"The attachment is of too long standing, and is too deep-rooted for either of them to be happy without the other; the only happy end, therefore, must be marriage. Perhaps if I forbid Tom the house, and pretend to insist the engagement should be broken off, this might bring Grace to her senses."

"Not a safe experiment to try," said Olivia. "I often wonder at Grace's hardness toward poor Tom," she went on, smiling at herself. "I have a decided weakness for Tom—he is so kindly, so honest, so hearty; last, not least, so handsome. 'Such a thundering fine fellow!' as one of his friends described him. There never is, and when he was a boy, there never was, any thing small, or mean, or cruel about any of his mischief. And, with all his seeming roughness, he was then, as he is now, so tender-hearted. Don't you remember, Walter, my telling you how he cried himself ill when he was quite a big boy, and one from whom no pain or punishment of his own could bring a tear, because in some wild play of his Grace got badly hurt? She has the scar on her temple now."

"I remember."

"If Grace could behave now at all in the same spirit she showed then, they might be very happy. With the blood streaming down her face, she kept saying, 'Please don't cry, Tom! it don't hurt much—it was my fault—please don't cry, Tom!'"

"If I am not mistaken," said Colonel Dacre, "here is that hero himself."

A few moments after, the room door opened rather noisily, and Mr. Blatchford came in.

"Where's Grace?" was his concerned question, repeated anxiously, after he had exchanged cordial greetings with Colonel Dacre, Olivia, and Alice. "Where's Grace? not ill?"

"She was here ten minutes since. The truth is, we have all been so unkind to her this morning that she went crying to her own room."

"Unkind to Grace! all of you! so unkind as to make Grace cry!" Hot anger flushed the fresh-complexioned face; then the speaker burst out laughing, and said, "I don't believe you, Miss Dacre. You are joking, or, at all events, you yourself haven't been unkind to Grace, nor has Colonel Dacre. It must be Alice—she looks so savagely inclined." He laughed again, louder, at the idea of cruelty from Alice to any one or any thing.

This laughter, mounting from open window to open window, reached, and did not mollify, Grace.

"But tell me really, though," he asked, with sudden seriousness, "is any thing the matter with Grace? Has she one of her headaches? Has she really been crying? It takes a good deal to make Grace cry."

Colonel Dacre answered,

"There is, I trust, nothing serious the matter. I should like to have a talk with you presently; but first, won't you have some breakfast?"

"You are quite sure there is nothing serious the matter?"

"Quite, as far as any one can be sure of any thing."

"Then I don't mind if I do have some breakfast. I've had a good swim in the river, as well as a twelve-mile ride already this morning."

"Well done! well done!"

"I don't know about that; honesty compels me to mention that I was only so early because I was so late. I haven't been in bed to-night."

Mr. Blatchford subsided into a chair, and devoted himself with hearty good-will for the next quarter of an hour to the discussion of the good things on the breakfast-table. When he had breakfasted, he asked who would take a message to Grace for him. Olivia and Alice were either of them ready to do so.

"Ask her, please, to come down and see me; tell her it is to say 'good-bye'—tell her I'm going away, off on my travels again; it's true, a real long journey."

Alice was leaving the room with this message, when Mr. Blatchford added,

"Please make her understand that I ~~must~~ and will see her—that if she won't come to me, I'll search the house till I find her, and break in any door I find locked."

Here Colonel Dacre interposed.

"That is hardly a message to send by a lady to a lady. Alice may deliver the first part, if she pleases, but I don't sanction the transmission of your threat."

"It wasn't meant for a threat, I assure you, colonel. It is the most matter-of-fact statement of my intentions—my determination."

"They are intentions that can not be carried out in my house."

"But what am I to do? Grace I must and will see! Would you have me start off, 'it may be for years, and it may be forever,' and not have a word with Grace?"

"Here she is," said Colonel Dacre, who faced the door, to which Tom's back was turned.

Mr. Blatchford went to meet her. He stared hard at her, trying to discover any traces of the tears of which he had heard. He couldn't find any. Grace was looking a little paler than usual, but quite calm and dignified. She carried her head high, and by no means showed any sign of a softened mood. The intolerable idea that they had all been laughing at her was the one uppermost in her mind; to make Tom suffer for this was her resolution.

CHAPTER VI.

WRANGLING.

"This senseless woman vexes me to the heart; She will not from my memory! Would she were A man for one two hours, that I might beat her!"

"I THOUGHT the gentle voice, and the refined melodious laughter I heard, could be only yours!" was Grace's greeting. Then, extending her hand, while keeping him at arms-length, she added, "Good-morning, Mr. Blatchford. 'How are you?' is a needless question." She could not make the glance she cast at his fresh, healthy face quite as coldly contemptuous as she wished; nevertheless, it was any thing but affectionate.

"Good-morning, Miss Dunn, since it seems we are to be ceremonious." He dropped the hand, which was struggling for freedom, and Grace passed on to the window, where she seated herself in her favorite chair, and took out a bit of embroidery from a work-basket lying on the little table which stood near it:

Mr. Blatchford followed her to the window, and planted himself there just opposite to her. She did not look up or notice him, but seemed engrossed by the pattern of her needle-work; he knew, from some old experiences, that this was done to provoke him.

"I am an early visitor this morning, am I not?" he asked. "You must be surprised to see me here so early."

"Nothing any longer surprises me in you," was answered, without looking up.

"The fact is, I haven't been to bed at all to-night. It didn't seem worth while when it was full daylight, so I just had a good swim in the river, and then rode on here."

"Important affairs of some kind, or close study, kept you up, doubtless."

"Well, no, not exactly. You know I'm not given to close study, nor am I, thank goodness, much weighted with important affairs." He was trying to make his tone as cold and as careless as hers. "The fact is, we were just making a jolly night of it—about a dozen of us—over at Sharpton's place. You know Sharpton?"

"I have that doubtful honor."

"Ah! I remember, you don't like him—many women don't. But it's prejudice! He's a thorough good fellow! we were all good fellows there! It was awfully grand! It was a moonlight night, you know, last night, and we had supper on the lawn—startling the night-ingales; lots of Champagne—more than enough for some of us, perhaps! And how we sang! You might almost have heard us over here!"

"To have heard you would, no doubt, have been an inestimable privilege."

"I shouldn't put it as strong as that; but it was awfully fine. Some of the fellows had splendid voices, and the echoes from the rocks by the river were 'rather to be heard than imagined,' or 'rather to be imagined than described,' as the newspapers would say. Unless

you'd heard it, you couldn't fancy how fine it was."

From Grace no answer or remark.

"After supper," Tom therefore continued, "we of course had a little card-playing. Equally, of course, as it was after supper, I had my usual after-supper ill luck. Consequently, I'm a little low this morning—not only in spirits, but in funds. And I've come to you to be cheered up."

Here Tom made a comical grimace, quite lost on the person for whom it was intended.

Grace did not look up. She worked away at her embroidery with a fierce sort of industry. Her face was cold and hard, but there was a hot surging of angry blood in her brain. Grace knew she was being defied, set at naught. She knew, or thought she knew, which had the same effect, that an intentionally over-colored picture of the night's amusement was being presented to her. And it is probable, though Grace would never have admitted this, even to herself, that she would rather have believed that all she was told, and more than she was told, was true, and have had it confessed to her with humble penitence, and profuse protestations and promises of amendment, than suspect, as she did, that more than the truth was being flaunted in her face. Grace presently broke the brief silence by saying, in a clear, dry voice,

"I hope, Uncle Walter, you have heard the charming description of the way last night was passed, with which Mr. Blatchford has been favoring me."

Colonel Dacre had lingered at the table over his newspaper. Miss Dacre and Alice had left the room some moments before.

"I was reading, Grace," he now said, laying down his paper as he spoke.

He rose from his chair and rang the bell, adding,

"I should like to see you in the library before you leave, Blatchford; but no doubt you'll stay to dinner, so there's plenty of time for that. I should think, Grace, you'd better let Hicks clear the table before you enter upon any altercation, discussion, explanation, or whatever it is to be."

Colonel Dacre left the room as the gray-headed old butler came into it. Grace, in any other mood, would have proposed that, on such a lovely summer morning, they should go outdoors; but this would not have been consistent with the part of dignified displeasure she was enacting. She was, besides, so completely in the dark as to what Mr. Blatchford might intend her to understand from his new tone that she preferred to be quite passive. She therefore only sat still and waited, working resolutely.

For some minutes after the old servant left the room, the silence continued unbroken. Then Mr. Blatchford, who all the time stared at Grace with a comical mixture of rueful wistfulness and dogged determination, began to hum an air from a popular opera. This provoked Grace to break the silence.

"It needed only this," she said, "to show me that your conduct this morning is studiously and intentionally offensive. You know how I detest your habit of humming, and you know that I have a particular aversion for that tune."

"I beg your pardon, Grace. I won't say I had forgotten your presence, but you certainly seemed unconscious of mine."

"And you took that refined and agreeable way of rousing my attention!"

"By Jove, Grace, I'd defy any one looking at you now, and hearing the sort of voice in which you speak, to believe that you love the man standing opposite to you! And yet you do love me, Grace—you know you do."

"I certainly have loved you, but love is not an incurable folly," answered Grace. She spoke without lifting her eyes, and, as she spoke, turned her head a little on one side to inspect her work from a fresh point of view, as if more interested in that than in the subject under discussion.

"Perhaps not!" Tom assented, as he made a sudden dash at Grace's embroidery, and succeeded in snatching it from her hand.

"I don't beg your pardon," he said; "you ought to beg mine. I know that when you keep your eyes and your fingers busy with some infernal bit of stitching like this"—he looked at it with some tenderness, and laid it with some care out of her reach—"you mean to be provoking and insulting. You have been successful. I am provoked and insulted. Are you pleased now?"

Grace colored furiously, but said nothing. Taking out her handkerchief, she ostentatiously occupied herself in wiping the blood from a slight needle-scratch on her finger. An instant after, before she was in the least prepared for any such demonstration, Tom's arm was round her, holding her too tight to allow her to extricate herself, and Tom was kissing the scratched finger.

"I'm a regular brute, I know, Grace; I'm always hurting you one way or another, ever since I made this mark." And Mr. Blatchford's lips transferred themselves to the scar on Grace's temple.

Grace, whose feelings seemed much less than usual under her control this morning, taken by surprise in this way, relented. She shed a few tears, with her forehead resting against Mr. Blatchford's shoulder, before she even tried to withdraw herself from his arm. When, presently, he left her free, he threw himself into a low chair, which he pulled very close to her. The ice now was effectually thawed.

"It's quite true, Tom, that you're always hurting me," Grace said, in rather a broken voice; "not that I call such a scratch as this a hurt, though you can be sorry about this. No, Tom, you hurt much deeper than that, and without being at all sorry."

"Only be a little kinder to me, Grace, and then see if I don't behave ever so much better when I come back. Not that I promise any

thing, mind you! I've sworn to myself to make no promises. But be a little kind to me to-day, anyhow, in case I never should come back."

"Where are you going?" Grace was startled and offended.

"Far enough for there to be plenty of chances of things happening that might rid you of me before I could get back again."

"I have no need to wait for chances of that kind to rid me of you, if I wished to be rid of you, I suppose, Tom?"

"Certainly not; but there are difficulties in getting rid of me in other ways. Your own heart won't let you rid yourself of me by your own act. While your Tom is alive, you will never be easy unless you are plaguing him, quarreling with him, lecturing him, or loving him. Now, if he were dead—"

"It would be only and always loving him!" interrupted Grace. "I should forget all the ways in which he grieves and teases and humiliates me! I should only remember how good he was to me when we were children, and that we have loved each other ever since we were children!" Grace's eyes grew moist contemplating this pathetic picture of her own constancy.

"Then, Grace, indeed I'd better make haste to be dead. For I uncommonly like the notion of your only and always loving me. But, it strikes me, it would be more sensible and comfortable, and more altogether satisfactory, certainly, to me, possibly to both of us, if you'd begin this 'only and always' loving me while I'm alive. Don't you think so, dear? Won't you try, Grace?"

His handsome face looked up at her with loving eyes from the level of her knee, as he lounged forward in his low chair. His voice was very tender and persuasive. If he had stopped there, he might have got a soft answer, perhaps even a voluntary, unasked-for kiss; but he went on to say, "Indeed, Grace, I do believe you can do without me no better than I can do without you. Why not end all this childish wrangling? Let us get married, and we shall rub on well enough together, for the love between us is a real thing, deeply ingrained—it won't rub off by such friction as we shall give it, as mere varnish might."

"You are too confident."

"You surely don't take it amiss that I should feel as confident of your love for me as I feel of mine for you?"

"I think your too great confidence in my love for you has been a great disadvantage to you, Tom. You make no effort to gain or to keep what you believe to be so entirely and inalienably your own."

"That shows how little you know of a man's heart and a man's life, Grace. It is in great part because you loved me that I have not gone altogether to the dogs."

"We won't argue this point, Tom. I am waiting to be told where you are going, why

you are going, for how long you are going, when you are going."

"I'm ready, willing, anxious to go nowhere, never away from you, if only you'll marry me off-hand."

"Which I certainly won't do."

"I'm heart-sick and weary of our late cat-and-dog life. I'm a fellow of a loving, quiet, peaceable disposition, whom this sort of thing don't suit."

"I'm hearing marvelous things, Tom. You of a peaceable disposition!"

"Certainly; so far as that I wish to be at peace with the woman I love. So if you won't marry me, I'm going first to Norway, salmon-fishing, midnight sun, and that sort of thing—where, afterward, I don't yet know."

"Norway!" echoed Grace. "I thought," there she paused; she had received a real wound, a stab, and she did not wish to show it. She had been going to say, "I thought we were to go there together, Tom;" for it had been agreed between them long ago that, when they married, they would go to Norway for their honeymoon.

"Norway first, as I said," repeated Tom; "where afterward, I don't yet know. Of course I shall try always to keep you informed of my whereabouts."

"Very kind, I am sure."

"And any day you choose to write to me, 'Come home, Tom,' honestly meaning that when I come home you'll marry me, you may depend upon it I'll come just as quick as mortal measures can bring me."

Grace meditated. She did not believe that Tom had forgotten her wish to go to Norway. She believed that he mentioned Norway as his destination to pique or to bribe her into yielding to his desire that they should be married at once.

"This is all very absurd, Tom," Grace began.

"Just one of the things I'm so heartily tired of hearing you say, Grace. According to you, I'm always either absurd or wicked. Now I don't find that other people take the same view of me."

"I assure you I'm quite as tired of having to call you absurd, and to think you so, as you can possibly be of hearing yourself called so. But what you have been saying now is all quite absurd. You know you have only to submit to a very few sensible conditions, to make me two or three promises, and—"

"And you'd reward me by marrying me, Grace, I know. Well, that's reward enough for almost any thing but loss of self-respect! But, Grace, I have some little pride and dignity. You don't consider these for me, so I'm obliged to consider them for myself. I'm willing to own you for my queen, but then I must be your king—not a mere slave, or even subject. Once for all, I'll not submit to conditions, *nor will I bind myself by promises. A woman who don't feel she can trust to my love, my*

honor, my generosity, has no right to let herself become my wife."

Tom spoke with energy. He had risen from his low chair and lounging attitude, and was now again standing right opposite to her. His head was thrown back, his attitude was firm and resolute, his face had a very determined expression. Grace, glancing up at him, thought what a splendid-looking fellow he was.

For a moment her heart quivered with doubt. Should she love Tom so well, and could she be so proud of him, if he were more yielding? And would it not be more rightly womanly, more dignified even, to give herself up to him, trusting him, as he said, rather than fight her fight out with him? These things she asked herself. She didn't speak, and Tom began again, aggressively,

"Do you think, Grace, I'd keep promises that had been extorted from me if they bound me to do or not to do things that my love for you wouldn't otherwise have bound me to do or to leave alone?"

"I thought," Grace answered, rather timidly, "that you would keep your word."

"I wouldn't do for the sake of my word what I wouldn't do for your sake, and because I held it to be the right and honorable thing to do."

"Wouldn't you, Tom?"

"No. I own that you have a perfect right to refuse to marry me if you think I drink, or smoke, or gamble, or whatever it is, more than I ought, and don't go to church and think seriously of things as much as I ought. But I dispute and I deny your right to drive a bargain with me. Take me on trust, or leave me! You study your own woman's dignity so much that I am obliged to take thought for mine as a man."

No word from Grace, who was feeling too much to know what she felt, or what she had better say.

"I am, as I said," continued Mr. Blatchford, "quite tired of things as they are—this constant off-and-on, constant wrangling and wrestling. I think we may both profit by time to reflect on what our future course shall be. Such reflections are best made under separation, at a distance one from the other. So I've arranged to sail from Hull, for Norway, to-morrow."

"Very well, Tom."

"I go to Hull this evening."

"Very well, Tom."

"When I shall come anywhere near Heath-erstone, or even England again, is quite uncertain."

"Very well, Tom; of course you must please yourself."

Grace did not, could not, would not, even now, believe that this was Tom's serious intention. Nevertheless, she was frightened. She did not look up in his face, but kept her eyes upon a ring she turned round and round on her finger, as she made him her provokingly

cool answers. But presently Tom's hand on her shoulder, shaking it, not too gently, made her look up.

Tom's temper got the better of him, and lost him all the advantage of his dignified attitude of some moments before. He put himself completely in the wrong, poor fellow, justified Grace to herself, and checked any disposition in her to come to terms, by abusing, in good plain language, her coldness of heart, her selfishness, her self-complacent pride. Grace pushed off his hand, and rose to leave the room. He made a clutch at her sleeve, and tore it in trying to detain her, and so added to her sense of outrage and ill-usage, and his sense of rudeness and barbarity.

Left alone, Mr. Blatchford immediately quieted down.

"I'm afraid I've done it this time," he said to himself, dolefully. He lingered and listened for half an hour, thinking Grace might relent and return. Then he rang the bell and sent a message by a servant, asking if Miss Dunn could see him again for one minute.

Miss Dunn was particularly engaged, he was

told. Then he wandered despairingly into the garden to look for Miss Dacre and Alice, to wish them "good-bye."

Colonel Dacre saw him from one of the library windows, and called to him. But Mr. Blatchford sulkily but respectfully declined to be talked to to-day.

"Grace will tell you about it. I've made a brute of myself—and there's nothing left for me to do but to go."

When he found Olivia and Alice he took Alice aside, and, holding her hand in his, and bending so low that his lips almost touched her hair, implored her to use all her influence to soften Grace toward him. Then he got his horse and rode away.

Grace, hidden behind her lace curtains, watched him out of sight, with a very heavy and sore heart.

"Poor fellow," she said, "how crest-fallen he looks! When he comes back this evening I will be very kind to him." Her heart, however, did not believe that he would come back. And her heart was right. Neither that evening, nor for many an evening.

BOOK III.—YOUNG JULIAN.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL.

"Hold your right there!
Love and high rule allow no rivals, brother."

COLONEL DACRE interested himself in so minute a way in the preparations made for receiving young Mr. Farquhar at Heatherstone, that he incurred the loving and yet rather impatient laughter and raillery of his sister, who told him his cares were more like those of a loving mother for a daughter than of one man for another. He took her raillery meekly, and answered to it apologetically, almost shyly.

"Well, Olivia, it is not a thing to be reasoned about, or for which I can account, but I have that sort of affection for Julian which makes me feel as if nothing could be too choice or too precious to be given to him."

"Nothing?" questioned Olivia, fixing him with her bright eyes.

"Possibly I should make one reservation," he answered, and, as he so answered, the bronze of his face took a redder tinge.

"Indeed, I should hope so! 'Love and high rule allow no rivals, brother!'" was the energetically spoken response.

Colonel Dacre looked as if he had more to say on the subject, and were about to say it.

The brother and sister were looking through the rooms which had been prepared for Julian, just before he was expected.

Colonel Dacre, who had been walking up and down, came to a pause, seemed to fall into a brown study, and perhaps forgot what he had been about to say.

Rousing himself presently, rubbing his hands across his eyes and his forehead. "Yes, no doubt it is strange!" he answered to his own thoughts.

"What is strange, Walter?"

"The strength of my feeling toward that boy. I doubt if I could resolve to keep any thing from him the possession of which I believed to be essential to his happiness."

"But, Walter, you really must be reasonable."

"That is quite true, I really must be reasonable;" he echoed his sister's words in a manner to suggest that his thoughts had either gone before, or had loitered behind those words.

"Well," he went on presently, "I hope poor Grace, who seems terribly out of sorts and ir-

—ust now, won't make herself too disa-

greeable to Farquhar—not to an extent to spoil the pleasure of his visit, at all events."

"Oh no," said Olivia, brightly, "she won't do that."

"Above all things, Olivia, don't let her touch upon the question of Julian's parentage—about which she chooses to think there is some mystery. Let her know that she will anger and grieve me almost past forgiveness if she, either maliciously or carelessly, brings this subject forward."

"She won't do that, Walter."

"I have no doubt Captain Farquhar knew every circumstance connected with Julian's birth; but, as you know, his death was sudden, without an hour's warning."

"Yet it seems to me, brother, that, if he had known any thing, it would add to the boy's happiness to know, he would have taken at least as much pains to secure that the knowledge should one day come to Julian, as he took to secure Julian's inheritance of his property."

"One would think so. But the interests of people then, when he died, still living, may have been concerned, and he had no intimate friend of his own in reach to whom he could have confided an important secret. Who put these flowers here?" was questioned abruptly, as Colonel Dacre bent over a pretty bouquet placed on the writing-table in what was to be young Julian's study.

"Alice."

"I thought they had not been arranged by a servant."

"Alice asked me, not if I would like her to put flowers there, but if I thought you would like her to do so; so I was forced to answer 'yes.'"

"Quite right. It was very kind of Alice to think of it. But why do you imply that you would have answered differently if it had been your wish that she had consulted?"

Olivia's bright eyes perused her brother's face keenly, then she answered, evasively,

"If you choose to try and spoil your young friend, there is no need that we should all help you to do so."

"Why is it, Olivia—or is it only a fancy of mine that it is so—that while at first you took to my young friend, as you call him, in your usual warm-hearted way, you have lately seemed rather to grudge him my love and my praise? And you certainly have not seemed pleased that he should come here."

"If this is so, can you not guess why it is so?"

"No, indeed."

"You have no suspicion?"

"Positively none."

"Then, you fond, foolish, noble fellow, I have nothing to tell you."

"Inexplicable riddles are even the simplest and noblest of women!" commented Colonel Dacre, with a slight shrug. Still contemplating Alice's nosegay, "Just Julian's favorite flowers," he remarked.

"There is nothing strange in that, Walter," she said, quite sharply, "considering that they are the flowers which just now are most abundantly in season."

"I did not say there was any thing strange." Colonel Dacre looked at her with some wonder. Then he turned to the book-shelves, "The same fairy fingers have been busy here, I think," he said. "By chance, intuition, or sympathy, these recently-added volumes are Julian's favorite poets."

"Neither chance, intuition, nor sympathy, I should say, Walter, but just knowledge. You forget how much Alice has been at Greythorpe, and how much she must have seen of Mr. Farquhar there."

"For the moment I had forgotten. She told me in her letters about the visits there, and the readings, and how much she enjoyed them."

Colonel Dacre, moving to one of the windows, immediately called his sister to his side, to admire with him the riding of young Mr. Farquhar, who, now in shadow, and now in shine, as the trees shut back the sunshine or let it through upon him, was just coming up the drive.

"With what an easy, gallant sort of grace he sits his horse, Olivia! His hand has the lightness of a lady's, and the iron nerve of a knight's. He only needs armor and the more heroic dress, to be just the young knight, spotless and stainless—Sir Galahad, for instance—of an old legend; or the fairy-prince of an old fairy tale."

"At his age you were at least his equal, brother."

"Even if that were ever so, save in your half-maternal imagination, Olivia, how long since that time is made to feel when one remembers that I might now be, as far as age goes, this fine young fellow's father."

"Hardly, Walter, or only on a scale of computation which would enable me to say I might have been his grandmother."

"Come, dear Grannie, let us down and welcome Prince Julian; and I know that, for my sake, and also for his own, when you are face to face with him, your welcome will be a right loving one."

Saying this, he threw his arm round his sister, and they went together down the broad shallow steps of the oak staircase, the south wind blowing sunshine and sweet odors into their happy, handsome, loving faces, through the open door of the hall.

CHAPTER II.

HIS ARRIVAL.

"God of the spring-tide in life's year,
Lord of an age of purest gold,
Youth, dear to all, thou'rt trebly dear
To me that now am growing old."

MR. FARQUHAR, when he saw the brother and sister standing together in the portico, lifted his hat, and waved it over his head, with genuine boyish glee.

"My own welcome of myself as a guest at Heatherstone!" he laughingly explained, as he sprang from his horse, to whose head had come a groom who had been on the watch.

"It sha'n't be for want of other welcome that you welcome yourself," spoke Colonel Dacre, his hands on Julian's shoulders. "It is indeed good to have you here!"

Over all Colonel Dacre's face spread the illumination of earnestly affectionate pleasure; the younger face of the welcomed guest beamed with kindred feeling, and this similarity of expression made the two faces at that moment startlingly alike.

Olivia's welcome was hardly less thoroughly cordial than her brother's. It always happened that, directly she came into personal contact with young Mr. Farquhar, any slight reserve of distrust or of disapproval she had been keeping against him in her heart melted away.

"That horse of yours is a perfect creature, Julian!" Colonel Dacre remarked, watching it as the groom led it off.

"It was the general's present. I want you to ride it. It would suit your weak shoulder far better than that hard-mouthed brute I saw you on the other day."

"If it suited me ever so well, I should grudge to lose the pleasure of seeing you on it. Olivia, do you know where Alice and Grace are?"

"Very near you, Walter."

At that moment the two girls came through the hall to join the group in the portico, and to welcome Colonel Dacre's friend.

Grace, still the secret object of Julian's homage, all the more, perhaps, that she either repelled or ignored it, moving toward him with stately composure, greeted him with elaborate graciousness. Alice was at once shy and friendly in her greeting, gravitating immediately to the protecting shelter of Colonel Dacre's side, her hand, by some mutual movement of intimate understanding, being drawn through his arm.

They all lingered where they were a little while.

It was a perfect summer afternoon, of balmy air, of golden sunshine, of all delight. The scene was one of intensely peaceful and home-like loveliness. The sunshine pouring down the soft slopes of the opposite hills, filled to overflowing the intermediate valley, and seemed to run up again to lie caressingly on the Heatherstone lawns, and to glow richly on its bowers and beds and thickets of roses. A sleepy, intermittent cawing of rooks and cooing of wood

pigeons—in the fine old trees by which the house was sheltered from the keen northern blasts that came from the distant sea across the moor—and the noise of falling water in the depth of the valley, were the most audible sounds when human speech was silent.

"A land where it is always afternoon," quoted Julian, whose loving-looking eyes were gazing about him lovingly.

"Do you have any troubles here?" he asked; "especially any disputes or dissensions? Wars and fightings among men (or women) would seem so peculiarly out of place."

"Greythorpe is surely quite as quiet as Heatherstone," remarked Grace, already feeling antagonistic.

"It does not so strike me. The situation is very different. Here you seem to live completely in a little kingdom of your own. You have a way out, down there in the south-west, where you get a bit of far distance; otherwise you seem, in a very unique manner, utterly secluded, without being shut in. Probably, however, I couldn't have the same feeling about Greythorpe, even if the situation were similar. I know that we have pain and trouble there; besides which, where the dear old general is there can not be an atmosphere of delicious, soothing calm, the very poetry of repose, like this."

Grace, anxious to make some anti-sentimental demonstration in acknowledgment of what she considered an absurdly sentimental speech, was helped to an opportunity by the sounding of the first dinner-bell.

"Is that sound consistent with the very poetry of repose, Mr. Farquhar?" she asked. "Doesn't it jar upon your imaginations concerning the 'delicious soothing calm' of this lotus-eating land, where it is always afternoon? Suggesting, as it does, the horribly incongruous notion of a kitchen, a cook, a dinner, and a dining-room?"

Grace's mocking was not sweet-toned; she spoke with contemptuous asperity. Mr. Farquhar's face expressed a gentle wonder how he had offended. He answered, with unruffled good temper,

"I confess to an appetite which makes the suggestion of some more substantial food than lotus far from disagreeable. The bell is a mellow-toned, pleasant-sounding bell, too, disturbing the harmony of things as little as possible. I am inclined to find every thing just as it should be at Heatherstone," he added, with an affectionate smile for Colonel Dacre.

As, obeying the summons, they crossed the threshold of the house, Colonel Dacre, after a loving pressure, relinquished Alice's hand, and, with his again on Julian's shoulder, said,

"The heartiest of heartfelt welcomes! Take the Spanish compliment as a sober, sincere statement, and consider me, my house, and all that is mine, at your disposition, young friend."

With a mischievous light sparkling in his

eyes, Julian replied, out of careless lightness of heart, glancing at Alice as he spoke,

"With one exception I think, sir."

Alice flushed rosy red, as he had seen her flush once before. Colonel Dacre answered, smiling, avoiding any look at Alice which might add to her embarrassment,

"I think I need make no exception. In such a case, of all or nothing, the act of reservation would imply a doubt, so it seems to me, as to whether one were really in possession of the thing reserved."

"A very enigmatical sentence, uncle—quite beyond my understanding, though, doubtless, understood by Mr. Farquhar's more subtle and poetical brain."

"This way, Julian—I will show you your rooms," Colonel Dacre said; at the foot of the stair he added, while Grace might still be within hearing—"My niece Grace is somewhat irritable and sharp-tongued just now. You must excuse her."

Of course, Julian only answered with chivalrously warm denial of having any thing to excuse. As they walked along the broad corridor, lighted by large windows of stained glass at its east and west ends, Julian said,

"I mustn't forget Mrs. Burmader's message; she petitions that you will spare Miss Fairfax to her for a few days. If this could be while I am here, it would relieve the time of my absence. Nantie has taken an extraordinary affection for Miss Fairfax."

"It is not with your usual gallantry that you call it extraordinary, Julian."

Something in that simple speech of Julian's both piqued and pleased Colonel Dacre.

"I used the word thoughtlessly, and am quite ready to own that it was singularly inappropriate," Mr. Farquhar replied, with penitent eagerness, fearing that he had wounded his friend.

These two men sometimes showed a sensitiveness, each in regard to things which concerned the other, more like the sensitiveness women feel where those they love are in question, than like any thing that is ordinary in friendship between men.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TERRACE.

"That you are not another is your wrong, And yet—I'd have that other more like you. It is the curse of women, weak or strong, The thing they would not is the thing they do."

THAT dinner-time, and the evening which followed it, were among the pleasantest they any of them (except, of course, poor Grace) remembered.

After dinner they strolled up to a little rustic hut at the highest point of the grounds, where coffee and fruit had been set ready. They seated themselves, however, not within

the hut, but on the fir-tree trunks which formed the steps to it.

Julian Farquhar had the rare grace and gift of being always interested and interesting. More often than not it was rather what he drew out of other people—what he made them say—than any thing he said himself, which caused those who were with him to feel him to be so delightful. It was with his heart more than with his brain that he worked his miracles of fascination. He had no vanity, and he had great tact and tenderness, and a wonderful power of ready sympathy. That he was too facile to be deep, was sometimes said of him, but unjustly, by those who, having no facility, laid claim to depth.

This evening, under Julian's influence, Colonel Dacre had come out in the most astonishing manner. Julian made him disinter half-buried experiences, revived his memory of half-forgotten adventures and anecdotes, stimulated him to describe stirring passages of arms, in which he himself had borne a prominent part, till almost, if not quite, blushing behind his bronze, Colonel Dacre exclaimed, remonstratingly,

"Julian, Julian, you are the most subtle and stealthy of flatterers. You not only make a man praise himself, but believe in his own praises of himself. I have grown immensely in my own estimation, feel ever so much bigger a fellow, since you came into my house. As to Olivia and Alice—"

"I assure them," asserted Julian, smiling into Olivia's bright, pleased eyes, "that we have kept to the dryest and most unadorned statement of facts."

"So I believe," said Olivia.

And then Julian's eyes, following the direction of Colonel Dacre's, rested upon Alice. Alice's intensified face, as she looked up fondly and proudly into Colonel Dacre's and put her soft, little, willing hand, half-shyly, into his, stretched out for it, struck Julian as, from the poetical and picturesque side, extremely interesting.

It was now the midsummer twilight. There would be no darkness, for the sky was without a cloud, and the full moon was disentangling herself from the tree-fringed rim of the eastern hill. The air was full of summer scents, from roses, lilies, honeysuckle, sweet-brier, syringas, with which mingled the aromatic odor from the fir-trees, brought out by the cool touch of evening, after the sunny heat of the day; full, too, of summer sounds, of the last singing of blackbird and thrush, and of those less articulate chirpings, twitterings, hummings, and murmurings of summer life subsiding to silence, more tender and more soothing than positive song, through which whispered a little dreamy memory of wind, sighing in the tops of those fir-trees, and the tinkling fall of distant, deep-down water.

The scene, the time, the circumstances, the atmosphere, not only of the place, but of the

people, suddenly surprised young Julian's heart into a more vivid and distinct longing to love and to be loved than had ever before troubled him. Perhaps he envied his friend. But yet, if he envied his friend, it was because he loved and was beloved, not because it was Alice whom he loved, and by whom he was loved. Nevertheless, he looked at Alice more often and with more attention than he had ever done before.

Thinking how immaculately pure was Alice's fairness, he occupied himself with wondering to what flower to liken her. Not to the lily, because the whiteness of the lily, associated with such an overpowering wealth of fragrance, suggests a white heat of passion. Not to the snow-drop, though the snow-drop, in the meek innocence of its unsoiled, ununsunned, new-born expression (surely flower faces, as well as human faces, have expression), had more resemblance to Alice, but it was too wintry cold.

He looked at Alice so long, as he might have looked at a picture, that Alice's eyes, full of sweet, serious thought, were drawn to his. Then the softest warm pink crept over the whiteness, her free hand stole up, in her gentle embarrassment, to push back her hair, which the coming and going of the faint breaths of the summer evening lifted and ruffled into a little golden cloud on her forehead, and Julian decided that Alice was not like any one flower, but, as the spirit of summer twilight might be, of the essence of all flowers.

Then Julian turned his devout observance once more toward Grace, thinking that in the woman he loved he would like something a little more mature, a little less ethereal, than Alice.

"Our summers at Heatherstone are sadly short," said Colonel Dacre, with something like a sigh. "This year is an exceptional one; for often we have it cold into June, and cold again in September. We must make the most of this warmth and beauty while it lasts."

"Summers, everywhere, and of all sorts, are sadly short," affirmed Julian. "We all of us, in all ways, need to make the most of them."

"Ah! you happy young fellow, if they are as short for you as for me, you have, nevertheless, the prospect of—let us say a quarter of a century more of them."

"No, no, no!" cried Julian. "Don't make me out such a mere boy, especially in the presence of Miss Dunn, who I have a sort of feeling considers youth a fault."

"An enviable one, of which the correction is inevitable," was Colonel Dacre's aside.

"What profound moralizing!" said Grace, speaking for the first time since they had seated themselves.

"You have been looking such a profoundly meditative muse, Miss Dunn, that I have not ventured to disturb you."

As Grace once acknowledged this remark by an almost imperceptible elevation of the chin, while she slightly averted her head, Julian was

not encouraged to try to draw her into conversation. He turned to Olivia, and Grace thought him malicious, believed that he was studiously and subtly seeking to revenge himself and to wound her, when he said,

"I was just now, at dinner-time, going to ask you, Miss Dacre, when something intervened, if you know a Mr. Blatchford, more often called Tom Blatchford, who has lately been in this neighborhood?"

"We know him well; we have known him since he was a boy. His family lived then in our neighborhood; since he lost father and mother, he has been very unsettled, and has traveled a great deal."

"He's a glorious fellow, I should think! I'm much disappointed to learn that he has just started for Norway; I should like to have known more of him. Of course you have heard of his last exploit?"

"It is impossible to say what may have been Tom's last exploit," said Olivia. "Do you, Grace, know to what Mr. Farquhar is likely to refer?"

"No, indeed, nor do I wish to know. I have no desire to hear more than I can help of Mr. Blatchford's wild and discreditable adventures."

This bitter-toned speech made Julian pause a moment; then he said,

"Of course it is not for me to defend Mr. Blatchford, but I should have thought, from the little I have seen of him, that his adventures would not be discreditable, however wild."

"It is just possible, Mr. Farquhar, that your ideas and mine of what is discreditable might slightly differ."

Julian only bowed his head in gently deferential acknowledgment of these words; then he remained silent, lost in wonder as to how he had been so unfortunate as to offend this haughty princess. That the wrong must be his, could not be hers, he took for granted.

The subject would have dropped but for a question of Olivia's, who did not choose to see Julian's gentleness thus abused.

"What I alluded to happened very lately," Julian answered; "I was told of it by a man named Sharpton, who is a profound admirer of Mr. Blatchford's. Mr. Blatchford was riding home from Sharpton's place down the river, when, close to a low river-side public-house, he came upon a man and woman quarreling desperately. The man dealt the woman a heavy blow just as Tom rode up. Tom—I beg his pardon—" (here Grace muttered some angry words which nobody caught), "Mr. Blatchford immediately sprang off his horse, and, without waiting to see what became of it, attacked the man for his cowardly conduct in striking a woman. Upon which both man and woman set upon Mr. Blatchford. In the struggle that followed, the man fell into the water."

Mr. Blatchford jumped in after him and pulled him out, so quickly that he was only sobered by the shock; then, having threatened to keep

an eye on him, and to thrash him within an inch of his life if he ever again struck a woman, Mr. Blatchford remounted his horse, which had not strayed far, having found some sweet river-side grass to browse upon, and left them, good friends with each other, and abusing him."

"And that is your idea of an adventure in which there is nothing discreditable!" commented Grace.

"It certainly is!"

"I call it being disgracefully mixed up in a drunken brawl."

"I can hardly think you are serious, Miss Dunn?"

"I am always serious."

"Would you mind telling me," persisted Julian, with almost timid and very respectful inquiry, "to what part of Mr. Blatchford's conduct you take exception? You wouldn't have had him let the man knock the woman about without interfering? You can't object to his having pulled the man out of the water when he fell in? What is it, then, that displeases you?"

Julian could not, if that had been his studious endeavor, have made himself more intensely, almost intolerably, disagreeable to Grace than he was doing. Grace prided herself upon being more logical, reasonable, and dispassionate than the majority of women, and Julian was stirring her into a state of illogical, unreasonable irritation. She did not believe in the sincerity of his extremely gentle and deferential manner; she thought he was taking his revenge for her slighting treatment, and trying to annoy her. After some seconds of struggle for self-mastery, Grace said,

"I deny your right to drag me into the discussion of a distasteful subject, Mr. Farquhar," and so saying, rose majestically from her place among them and moved slowly away, descending with considerable stateliness, from terrace to terrace, toward the house.

Once in her own room, poor girl, she shed bitter tears.

Young Julian looked dejected and crestfallen. He was at an age when young men encourage themselves to fall in love; and he believed himself to be, or to be about to be, in love with Grace.

"You must excuse Grace's pettishness," pleaded Olivia. "She and Mr. Blatchford have been playmates or lovers all their lives. They have quarreled lately, and poor Grace is unhappy. I let you into our family secrets, you see, Mr. Farquhar."

"The engagement is broken, then?" asked Julian, who felt, or believed that he felt, as if he had received a blow.

"Only to be renewed again the first time they meet, as has happened before. They love each other too well for either to love any one else."

"What a pity," commented Julian, rather sentimentally, "to plant the rosy path of youth and love with thorns!"

"Youth, at all events, is a thing only those who have lost rightly value," said Colonel Dacre. "For example, here is Alice, to whom, if you wish to commend yourself, you should talk as if she had gray hair and wrinkles."

Beguiled by the moonlight and the balmy, dewless warmth, they sat on and on. By-and-by, after a village clock had struck eleven, the nightingales broke into a flood, a fury, of singing, and gave them a fresh temptation to linger.

Alice, all this evening, was very silent, perhaps rather more silent even than usual.

"More fit to be his child than his wife," Julian could not help thinking. "Evidently she worships him, but will that worship change to love, or stand in the place of love, when she is older? And how can he hope to find the rest and the sympathy such a man desires from his wife in so slight a girl?"

At last they really moved, and began to go down toward the house. Julian walked first, guiding Olivia, whose hand rested on his shoulder, as they went down the steep paths, across which the moonlight threw confusing shadows. The sheen of that moonlight on Olivia's silken, soft white hair, and its glitter on her bright, dark eyes, gave her more than ever of her inspired sibyl look, but he knew her now to be full of tender, careful domesticities.

When they reached smooth, level ways, and Olivia took her hand from its resting-place, Julian raised it to his lips and kissed it, saying, as he did so,

"I have heard much of you, Miss Dacre, and have much wished to know you, and now I know you, you seem to me to be far, far beyond anything I have heard."

"I hope you have not the eye of guile and the tongue of wile, Mr. Farquhar," Olivia answered, laughingly, resisting her inclination to make him some much more loving answer. She would willingly have kissed that smooth forehead or down-shaded cheek of his!

The four entered the lamp-lit drawing-room through the open windows. It was empty. Julian noticed this regretfully, and said,

"I should like to have tried to make my peace with Miss Dunn."

"It is shockingly late, and no doubt Grace has gone to bed—where it is quite time Alice should go," commented Olivia.

Refreshments were standing on a side-table. Colonel Dacre tried to persuade Alice to sip a little wine, saying that she was pale, her hands cold—that he feared she had been out too long and too late. She was standing just under the full light of the lamp, as she put her lips to the wine to please Colonel Dacre, and smiled up into his face.

"The moonbeams have bleached Miss Fairfax, as they have done all the other flowers," said Julian, gallantly. "To-morrow's sunshine will, doubtless, bring back the delicate rose again."

Olivia took possession of Alice now; togeth-

er they bade good-night to Colonel Dacre and to Julian, and went away.

"I suppose," Julian said to Colonel Dacre, with his sweet smile, "I am not required to seem not to see what I do see. I hope Miss Fairfax is not as delicate as she looks. Do you know," Julian went on, rather hesitatingly, "it seems to me as if to love Miss Fairfax must be something like loving a moonbeam, a lily, a dew-drop, or a fairy."

Colonel Dacre did not speak immediately. Julian had time to fear that he might have displeased or pained his friend. When he spoke it was with a peculiar, measured quietness.

"Alice is not to be known and understood at once. I sometimes suspect we none of us half know her yet. Nothing has happened to sound the depths of loyalty, bravery, and devotion in her young heart." He went on in a different voice, a voice into which passion gradually came: "Ah! Julian, you are too young to feel as I do the ineffable charm of youth. You can't understand the sort of envy and hunger of heart with which, if I would let myself, I should look on that smooth white forehead of yours, and that just down-darkened lip; you can't understand the passionate energy with which, were it not for the restraints set upon such desires by religious faith, I could crave to know that I had a hundred years and more in which to enjoy the realization of hope that lies before me; you can't understand the vivid, vibrating way in which I could cry, would I let myself, to the Lord, to let me tarry in this world which he has made so fair and so good."

Such words were to Julian as a revelation of the passionate nature of a man whom he would have been inclined to pronounce somewhat passionless.

"That I never had my youth when I was young may plead my excuse now," he added, quietly. "Now, when it would be more seemingly, perhaps, that I should be content to enjoy it by deputy in my son—but then, you see, I have no son."

"But you yourself are in the very prime and full vigor of life."

"I do not always feel so."

When at last they were about to separate, Julian said,

"It is one of those nights when it seems more worth while to stay outside, and try to surprise the secrets of the flowers, than to shut one's self up for sleep within four walls."

"When 'one' is a poet, with health, and not much more than twenty years. But when 'one' is a quarter of a century, perhaps, more than that—and has a touch of rheumatism!"

The sentence was only finished by an expressive shrug, and a smile very loving, but slightly melancholy.

For Julian that short white midsummer night had little sleep and little silence. The nightingales sang on till the full choir of blackbirds and thrushes overpowered them, as the moonlight was overpowered by the dawn.

CHAPTER IV.

SETTLING DOWN.

"A kind of weight hangs heavy at my heart;
 My flagging soul flies under her own pitch.
 * * * * * sure some ill approaches,
 And some kind spirit knocks softly at my soul,
 To tell me Fate's at hand."

JULIAN FARQUHAR had a secret over which he had hitherto been as shy as young girls used to be over the secret of a first love—he was writing a book. He had thought to put his work aside during the short time he had expected to be at Heatherstone, because, intending to ride over every day to Greythorpe, he knew he would not have more than enough time left to enjoy the society of his friends. But his stay at Heatherstone was to be much longer than any one had expected. He had not been there a week, when he returned from his daily visit to Mrs. Burmander with wonderful news. Olivia had that day authorized Julian to promise Mrs. Burmander that Alice should, if she wished, go immediately to stay with her.

"Not while Julian is with us," Colonel Dacre had pleaded.

"It is just while Julian is with us that we can best spare her, and that Mrs. Burmander will be most glad of her," was answered, in Olivia's most authoritative tone.

But now to frustrate Olivia came this wonderful news from Greythorpe. The general and Mrs. Burmander were going to start the very next day, if the weather favored them, "alone together," except for man and maid, on a driving tour, to revisit the places where they had passed their honey-moon. The scheme was, of course, the general's. Mrs. Burmander had sufficiently revived, under the influence of the dry, elastic, moor-land air, to lull the general's worst fears to sleep, and to prevent her doctor from absolutely forbidding the expedition, especially as her husband, without a word to any body, had been having a carriage built and fitted up with every luxurious modern invention for making movement easy. The old gentleman had arranged even the day for starting, and that they should take Heatherstone on their route, to show themselves to their friends there, before he himself said, or allowed Mrs. Burmander to say, a word to Julian about their intention.

"I thought he seemed curiously anxious to get me out of the way, to send me here," Julian said to Olivia. "As to having me with them, he won't hear of it. To have any third person, but most especially for that third person to be a 'big grown-up son,' would, he says, take all the romance out of the expedition. He is as gleeful as a boy about it all, and so proud of having kept his secret. He knew I should oppose him and remonstrate. And, indeed, I feel *very anxious about the whole affair.*"

"Does Mrs. Burmander herself seem to dread it?" asked Olivia.

"It is difficult to judge, Miss Dacre. She never can bear to disappoint the general about any thing. To her he is husband and child in one—she pets and humors him almost as much as she honors and loves him."

"I don't wonder; there is a great charm in his youthful-heartedness." But Olivia spoke rather absently. "And how long do they propose to be away?" she asked.

"The general talks of six weeks, or even more; but of course every thing will depend upon the way Nantie bears the traveling, and upon the weather."

"And while they are away we may be sure of keeping you."

Julian had just time to fancy that this was said more thoughtfully than cordially, when Colonel Dacre struck in, with warmest heartiness,

"Of course we may be sure of that, Olivia. I wish the boy to feel that this is home."

"If I may stay, Miss Dacre, I will promise not to be much trouble," Julian said, with his, as she always found it, irresistible expression, half timid, half audacious, and yet wholly loving and deferential.

"Trouble!" echoed Olivia, rousing herself. "What do you mean by talking to me of trouble? As Walter's friend, in Walter's house, you must be welcome, even if you were not, as you are, welcome as flowers in May, for your own sake."

So said Olivia, very forcibly; and, passing close to Julian on her way out of the room, Olivia, as much to her brother's as to her own astonishment, pushed the hair off Julian's forehead, and touched it with her lips, just where she had noted a momentary pucker of pained wonder, as he had felt, almost before she was herself conscious of feeling, that this prospect of his much-prolonged stay at Heatherstone was, for some reason, not altogether acceptable to Miss Dacre.

A glow of grateful pleasure overspread Julian's face. His was a nature to which the love of pure and good women was peculiarly welcome, and he had not known the love of his mother; he took and detained Miss Dacre's hand, but he said, looking up at her,

"I must go to London before long, Miss Dacre. I could quite easily go now, if, for any reason, this arrangement would be more convenient to you. I don't pretend to say I would like to go; but that has nothing to do with it. I feel it beautiful here; and I don't know when I have been so happy. If I may stay, I will settle down to my work, and won't get into any body's path. But if you have any shadow of a reason why it will suit you better that I should not stay, why then, of course—"

"You not only may, but you must stay," answered Olivia; and then Julian kissed and released the hand he had been holding.

But neither Julian nor Miss Dacre felt quite satisfied; there was some vague, uneasy feeling left. Julian fell into meditative silence when

Olivia was gone, which he presently broke by saying to Colonel Dacre,

"After all, I think it might be better that I should pay my visit to London, which must be paid before long, as I want to consult books, and to buy books, only to be met with in London, while Greythorpe is empty. If Mrs. Burmander should come home worse, I don't know when I could get there."

"Leave the future to take care of itself, Julian. I won't spare you. I won't have the full happiness of this perfect time maimed and spoiled. I want you here."

Two days after this, for the next day, which was to have been the day of departure, proved showery, just about luncheon-time the Burmanders drove up to the Heatherstone portico. Every body immediately went out to greet them. The general looked triumphant, Mrs. Burmander calm and happy.

"No, no, no; I won't have Marian get out, Dacre!" the general cried, as Colonel Dacre opened the carriage door and offered his arm.

"I have renewed my vow of obedience to my tyrant," smiled Mrs. Burmander. "This is our silver wedding-day."

There was then a chorus of exclamations and good wishes. The general said,

"That was to have been our secret. I meant to have been away from you all to-day! I won't let her get out, Dacre; it's no use offering your arm, and looking so seductive. She's so well packed in, pillows and all, though that boy, Julian there, thinks no one else can arrange them, that I won't have her move till we get to the end of the first stage. Things mightn't settle themselves as well again. She says she's quite as comfortable as on her couch at home. You did say so, didn't you, Marian?"

"Yes, Laurence, and it's quite true."

"So you needn't look so grave, grandfather Julian, you're not the only boy that can do it, you see! I've planned it all admirably. The very easiest stages, the healthiest halting-places, the traveling always to be done just at her strongest times of the day. It's all right, and couldn't be better, could it, Marian?"

"No, indeed, dear. He has thought, and, I believe, dreamed, about it for weeks," Mrs. Burmander said, affectionately, adding to Julian, "It is all so perfectly well arranged, and I am feeling so much stronger, that, indeed, dear boy, there is no need that you should be anxious."

They had not been ten minutes at Heatherstone before the general was in a fidget to be off.

"She's not to be tired by any of you," he said; "she's all mine, to have all to myself. Dacre, there is one thing you may give us, if you will—a bumper of Champagne!"

It was immediately brought. The general insisted that every body should drink to the success of their expedition, which was of course done with the heartiest cordiality. Mrs. Burmander leaned from the carriage to say some

confidential, low-spoken, re-assuring words to Mr. Farquhar. She wished Alice "good-bye" very lovingly, and said she hoped for a visit from her on her return; "if I am permitted to return," was added too softly to be heard by the general.

"If I'd have had any body with us," said the general, "it should have been that nice, quiet little girl."

Then they drove away. The general standing up in the carriage, his gray hair floating in the wind, as he flourished his hat above his head, shouted that somebody—that Miss Fairfax—was to throw a slipper after them. Olivia turned to Alice. Alice's foot was immediately taken out of its dainty little covering, which she picked up and threw.

When the carriage was out of sight Julian ran to fetch the slipper. Alice was leaning on Colonel Dacre's arm. Looking at it with curious wonder, as he carried it, Julian gave it, not to Alice herself, but to Colonel Dacre. Alice was quick in taking it from the colonel's hand, dropping it on the ground, and pushing her foot into it.

"The least one of your two knights could have done, Alice, should have been to kneel down and put it on for you," said Colonel Dacre.

"That is what Julian expected me to do, no doubt."

"You could not. I was leaning on your arm. And I should have been grieved if you had."

"It was my bounden duty," smiled Colonel Dacre, "but I was not quick enough."

"And I was not presumptuous enough," said Julian.

And now Mr. Farquhar "settled down" at Heatherstone. He had his manuscripts and his books of reference, of which, being a young writer, he possessed a considerable bulk, brought over from Greythorpe. He meant really to work, and hoped to make great way. He rose early, and worked till breakfast-time; after breakfast, and one hour of pleasant idleness, he worked till lunch. Of course, Julian was intensely interested in his work. As he grew more and more at home at Heatherstone, and threw off his shyness, he sometimes talked about this work. In pleasant contrast, then, to Grace's studied contempt, or, at the best, more or less civilly concealed indifference, shone Alice's sympathetically interested face.

If Colonel Dacre were present—Alice was as much braver in his presence as, in good old-fashioned times, young girls used to be in the presence of their mothers—Alice sometimes hazarded a remark, or a question. The first time she had done this the unconsciously arrogant young author had felt as much surprise as if the words had been spoken by a few-months-old baby. Some of his surprise had appeared in his face, and had brought a blush to hers, as she said, apologetically,

"Lonel has sometimes spoken to me about the same subject."

"Alice's blush was reflected on Julian's face—he blushing for his own rudeness in having brought that blush to hers. And these innocent blushes were noted by Olivia. Quite without his own knowledge that he was doing so, Julian acquired a habit of studying "Colonel Dacre's Alice"—at first much as he might have studied a picture, in which he was always, as he looked, learning to see new, and, to careless eyes, hidden meanings; or as he might have listened to subtle and delicate music, which he at first pronounced to be mere soulless sweetness, but from which he found soul and sense outbreathe as he listened more intently.

And by-and-by, quite as unconsciously to himself, Julian learned to talk chiefly for Alice when Alice was present, watchful for that look of intense intelligence to shine from her eyes, while

"On her mouth
A doubtful smile dwelt, like a clouded moon
In a still water."

One thing was not lost upon Julian. He noticed that whatever might be occupying Alice—however much she might be interested by any thing that was going forward—if something had to be done for Colonel Dacre, if he said any thing, almost, or so, it seemed to Julian, if he only changed his position or the expression of his face, all Alice's attention was his immediately.

"The most dutiful little lady-love a man could desire," thought Julian.

This perhaps dangerous study of Alice, and speculation about Alice, might have occupied Julian still more, had it not been, not only for the earnestness of his work, but also because, out of the inexhaustible and irrepressible sweetness of his nature, and the humility which made him feel himself in the wrong when he was conscious of being disliked, he set himself to try and conquer Grace's hostility, and to put himself on a footing of pleasant and friendly intercourse with her.

The girl was evidently not happy. He would have been glad to be useful to her, even to amuse her. But the more amiable anxiety he showed to make himself agreeable, the greater seemed to be the cross-grained satisfaction of Grace in treating him rudely and unkindly. When Grace tried to excuse to herself conduct of which she could not help being secretly ashamed, she explained the irritation Julian's gentleness and chivalrous "serviceableness" caused her by saying that he caricatured and made ridiculous those charms, graciousnesses, and amenities of mind and of manner, the total absence of which in Mr. Blatchford she regretted a great deal more than she chose to own.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE MOOR.

"His years are young, but his experience old;
His head unmelowed, but his judgment ripe."

THE afternoons, when the days were cool or cloudy, the evenings, if the afternoons had been too hot, were generally spent in riding to some point of view, or something in some way worth seeing in the neighborhood, to which Colonel Dacre wished to introduce Julian.

Olivia was not often of the party. In spite of her cheery brightness of spirits (just now under some slight cloud), she liked a good deal of solitude, silence, and stillness in her life, now that she was, as she said, "getting old." She was glad of these quiet times for reading, meditation, or for paying some charitable visit. So the party, except when some friend or neighbor joined it, generally consisted of only Grace and Julian, Alice and Colonel Dacre.

They were riding all four abreast one sultry July evening, on which they had not cared to go far, but had just climbed up on to the moor in search of fresh air, when Julian, who for some time had been chiefly occupied with attentive watching of Colonel Dacre's horse, said,

"I more than ever dislike that animal you're on, Dacre. She has restless, untrustworthy eyes—eyes that seem vigilant to do her rider some mischief. I thought so when I saw her in the stables; I think so still more, now I see her in action."

"Why, Julian, you're always finding fault with my horses. You abused my steady-going old favorite, and called him a hard-mouthed brute. Certainly, he did pull too much at my weak shoulder. Now you're beginning to abuse this mare! She's the tenderest-mouthed thing I ever mounted, and her paces are something wonderful for soft elasticity. When I know her a little better, I mean Alice to ride her; she's just fit to carry such a light weight. With Alice upon her, she'd go like a bird."

"In spite of her beauty—and she is a beauty—I should be sorry to see any lady upon her. I never did think you a very good judge of a horse, Dacre."

"I know you never did. And yet my experience has been pretty large, and I've not had many accidents or mistakes."

"But you never had any natural turn for horse-flesh."

"No gentleman has," pronounced Grace.

"That is quite true in one sense, Miss Dunn, and yet, in another, it is just as true that almost every gentleman has."

Grace merely turned her head aside, her manner of intimating that she did not think the subject worthy her further attention.

"To tell the truth, I had had some thought of putting Alice upon this mare to-morrow, if, on a thorough trial of her on turf, she behaved perfectly well," said Colonel Dacre; "but you have made me nervous about doing so. She was sold to me as a marvel of docile gentle-

ness, and I have seen nothing in her to contradict that character."

"To hear that said of her, and to look at her eye, would sufficiently assure me that the seller knew her to be something very different."

"You young cynic! I supposed the man I bought her of to be a gentleman."

"Anyway," said Julian, "you can't mind my mounting a horse on which you had thought of putting Miss Fairfax to-morrow. You have no right, with your weak shoulder, to try experiments. You should not allow it, Miss Fairfax." Julian spoke with affectionate peremptoriness. Alice smiled at the idea that she was "to allow" or "not to allow" Colonel Dacre to do this or that. "You won't mind changing with me now, will you? I have a fancy to try the creature here on the turf," was added to Colonel Dacre, persuasively.

"My confidence in your perfect horsemanship would stand a stronger test than that." As he spoke, Colonel Dacre, meaning before he dismounted to alter his stirrup to Julian's length, Julian being rather the taller, threw his whip on the ground to have his hands free.

Whether this startled the mare, or whether she was, as Julian judged her to be, really vicious, and now saw a chance of mischief that would pass unpunished, the whip was no sooner out of Colonel Dacre's hand than the creature began a series of wildest pranks and maddest endeavors to unseat her rider; back-jumping first; when that did not answer, standing almost erect, fighting the air with her forefeet.

It all transacted itself in such a flash that Alice had not had time to lose her instinctive confidence that nothing in the way of harm would happen to Colonel Dacre—that he would be sure to "dominate the situation;" no time to lose this feeling, and to realize that he was in horrible danger (for the mare was just preparing to do what it afterward did, when a groom was riding it, on which Colonel Dacre had it shot, throw itself backward), when Julian, who was a yard or so behind, whose horse was taller and perfectly trained, pushed to Colonel Dacre's side, got hold of his rein, swung himself off his own horse, and, by his weight hanging to her head, pulled the mare down. The next instant Colonel Dacre was on his own feet, and the danger was past. Grace had screamed just once. Alice had been quiet, but she was now, lips and cheeks, perfectly colorless, and conscious of the stealing over her of a deadly sort of sickness. As the old groom rode up and took the mare's head, Julian's right arm dropped helplessly to his side.

"That 'ood have been the death of 'ee, colonel, but for Mr. Farquhar," the old man pronounced. "The brute needed a good knock on the head to bring her down, and you'd nothing to give it her with. Another instant, and she'd have been over back'ard, and rolling on 'ee."

Colonel Dacre, muttering, "My God! if Alice had been riding her," changed color.

At that moment Grace called out to him, "Quick, Uncle Walter, and see to Alice;" for Alice had fainted, and was falling forward on her horse's neck. Colonel Dacre was just in time to prevent her falling farther by taking her in his arms. When he had disengaged her from the saddle, and had laid her on the turf well out of reach of all the horses, she came to herself almost directly. They neither of them said any thing, but Alice took one of his hands in both hers, as he bent over her, and pressed her lips to it, as if she would never take them away again. Then, as she stood up, leaning on Colonel Dacre's arm, she looked toward Julian. "He is hurt!" she cried immediately. "Oh! Lonel, Mr. Farquhar is hurt!"

"It is nothing, nothing," Julian hastened to say—"nothing, or something so little as to be nothing but a moment's hurt. A slight kick from that creature's hoof, perhaps, as she came down, or it may be a mere strain."

"Sit down, dear," Colonel Dacre said to Alice, taking her hand from his arm. Alice immediately obeyed him. He went to Julian, and tried to find out the extent to which he was hurt. But Julian made light of the whole thing, though it was easy to see that he was suffering acutely.

"I don't even know if it is my arm or my shoulder, a bruise or a strain. I am sure it can be nothing of any consequence. For the moment my arm feels helpless. Unfortunately, it is my right arm. I retract the word, 'unfortunately,'" he hastened to add, "heaven that I am to have used it, instead of just merely thanking Heaven that I was of use to you."

"Of use to me! Humanly speaking, you saved my life. I am not as light or as liessom as I once was, as you are; it would have been only by a miracle that I could have escaped if she had thrown herself back with me."

They had moved, as they spoke, close to where Alice was sitting. She looked up into Julian's face; the beauty and the intensity of her expression as she folded her hands together, without knowing that she did so, parted her lips as if to speak, but said nothing, almost startled him. And yet she looked so child-like that he would have been pleased to put his hand upon her head, as he smiled down, with moistened eyes, a smile that was fond in its tenderness of recognition of what her look meant.

If Olivia had been there, she would have found much in that look, answered by that smile, to disquiet her. It was true, too, that after the exchange of that look and smile they could never again feel far apart, or strangers; but it was no less true that, in spite of their intensity, both look and smile were as free from all ordinary passion, from any thing inconsistent with the most guileless loyalty and innocence, as if they had passed between two children, or two young girls.

"It is well we are only so short a distance from home," said Colonel Dacre. "You can

not ride, Julian, because of your arm; and Alice had better not, lest she should feel faint again. I will at once ride home with Grace. I shall send for a surgeon, that we may know to-night how much or how little you are hurt. Watts can do as he pleases about bringing the horses all home, or tying one up till he can send for it. (I should advise you, Watts, not to attempt to manage the three.) Alice says," he went on to Julian, "that she feels quite well again now, though she looks so pale. You and Alice had better, therefore, walk gently on. Be sure you don't hurry; go gently and softly. I shall try to have the surgeon at Heatherstone by the time you get there."

"I am sure there is nothing you need be anxious about. Will you have my sound arm, Miss Fairfax?"

But Alice declined it. They went softly and silently over the turf, each going slowly for the sake of the other.

Colonel Dacre rode forward with Grace, followed by the groom leading Alice's horse, when he had securely fastened the offending mare to an old hawthorn. Of course Alice was as far as possible from feeling that by one look she had thanked Julian enough. But she would need to find herself close to Colonel Dacre, her hand, perhaps, upon his arm, before she would venture upon any grateful words. Perhaps, too, some loyal instinct warned her that this hour of summer twilight, when she was aloof with Julian, was not the time to choose for any emotional outpouring.

Anyway, they went quite silently, side by side, till Julian, stumbling in the dusk, over the outstretched roots of some small bush he hadn't noticed, severely jarred his shoulder, and was provoked by the unexpectedness of the pain to a sudden exclamation.

Then Alice made a little pause, turned to him, and said, in a distressed voice,

"I believe you are much more hurt than you will let us know. I'm afraid you're suffering a great deal of pain."

"It was sharp for the moment. I was a fool to call out."

"If you would let me make a sling for you to put your arm into, I don't think walking would hurt you so much."

"It was only the accidental stumble that hurt me so much. I'm rather short-sighted. I will be more careful. Besides, if I want a sling, what have you of which you could make one?"

"My veil is long enough; and it is quite strong enough to last till we get home."

"Indeed I won't have you spoil your pretty veil."

"As if it could be put to any so good use."

And Alice unwound the long scarf of silvery gauze from round her throat and round her hat. As she did so, she said,

"It will be kind of you to let me do any thing that I think may lessen your pain."

"You shall do any thing you please. Now

how are you going to manage? I must kneel to a fairy like you, Miss Fairfax, if you intend to fasten it round my neck."

As he spoke, he laughingly knelt down and removed his hat.

"There was no need for that," Alice answered, as she threw the extemporized sling over his head; "for you could have put it on yourself!"

"But I much prefer receiving my order of knighthood from this kind little hand to conferring it upon myself," Julian answered, gallantly. If Colonel Dacre had been there he would, perhaps, have kissed "the kind little hand" before he rose; as it was, he did not allow himself to do so.

They moved on again. After a few moments he declared his arm to be ever so much easier. She answered that she was very glad; and very little more than this passed between them during the hour it took them, at the slow pace at which they walked, to reach home.

It was one of those breathless, after midsummer, evenings, when the sober richness of sunset color will linger long, with hardly perceptible change. Every bush on the opposite ridge of moor was darkly defined against the glowing background, and every little sound had a sharp distinctness in the sultry silence.

When they reached the house, the surgeon was waiting to examine Julian. Olivia took possession of Julian, hungering, by deeds, not words, to show her sense of what she felt she owed him. Her scissors cut his sleeve from wrist to shoulder; she applied the fomentations, and prepared the bandages.

"It is difficult to understand how you could get so much hurt without being more hurt," the surgeon said. "It is a marvel that the bone is not smashed. The cure will, possibly, be tedious. You must consider it might have been your skull, and from that thought take patience."

"He has many a better thought than that to give him patience, Mr. Mostyn," observed Olivia, with a loving smile for Julian.

Julian's arm and shoulder were to be kept wet with linen steeped in iced water. Olivia would trust this duty to no one else that first night. In spite of her care the surgeon's morning report was not very favorable. There was more tendency to inflammation than he had expected. His patient had had little sleep, and was feverish. The sultry heat of the weather was against him.

"You have some opportunity of learning the thorough, through and through sweetness of Julian's disposition," Colonel Dacre said to Olivia. "This interruption of his work is a considerable trial to him. And Mostyn says the pain is a good deal more, probably, than one would imagine; yet you won't hear a word or see a look that betrays suffering or disappointment."

"His disposition is strangely like your own, Walter. I read somewhere the other day that

Aristotle says—I think, at least, it was Aristotle—that friendship is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies—reading that, I thought directly of you and Julian.”

“I see you mean to shut my mouth from praising Julian, by always turning my words against myself. And yet I don’t think you any more grudge him my praise. Never forget, Olivia, that what you hold so very precious, my life, in all probability would have passed from you before now, if it had not been for young Julian.”

This was said with an impressive significance which painfully affected Olivia.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THEY SPOILED JULIAN.

“And can you be so pitiful?
So dutiful because you urge it, sir?”

“ALICE! Alice! Where is Alice?”

This was Colonel Dacre’s call and question one stifflingly hot afternoon a week or two later. Alice was not to be found in the house, and no one seemed to have seen her for some time.

Colonel Dacre pursued his search in the grounds, and by-and-by came upon her. His step, noiseless upon the deep mossy turf at the foot of the great old walnut-tree, under which she was sitting, had not disturbed or forewarned her, and it struck him that her expression was somewhat sad. An open book was on her knee, but she was gazing straight out in front of her. The green shadow of the leaves made her fairness look pale. When she knew he was close to her, her whole aspect and attitude changed; both had seemed slightly rigid; but when she looked up at him and smiled, she woke to soft and rose-hued life.

“Were you looking for me? Do you want me, Lonel?” she asked, with some slight, soft eagerness.

“Do I not always want you, Alice?”

“Are you quite sure of that, now you have Mr. Farquhar?”

“I am quite sure of that, even though I have Mr. Farquhar.”

“But you wanted me now for something, perhaps, Lonel?”

“For this precious little something yourself,” he answered, lightly laying his hand upon her shoulder.

She pressed her cheek down upon that hand, and smiled content, and questioned him no more.

“Isn’t it pleasant here?” she presently said, softly. “Won’t you stop here with me a little? I should like to ask you something about what I have been reading—to have one of those nice talks we haven’t had for so long a time, not once since Mr. Farquhar came.”

“Are you jealous of Mr. Farquhar, Alice?”

“Grace says I ought to be; perhaps I am, just a little.” She smiled up into his face

frankly. “You will stay a little while now, won’t you?” was added, persuasively.

This was temptation; that soft mossy turf by Alice’s side, where he could lie, holding her hand in his, and looking into that face which, for him, was the most exquisite thing in this world, invited him to yield to the petition of the wistful eyes. But he did not yield.

“To tell the truth, Alice, I did want you ‘for something.’ I was seeking you with a petition. It will please me very much if you will come with me, instead of my staying with you. If you will join us—Olivia, Julian, and me—in Julian’s study, and will help us to amuse him. He was saying just now that he has not seen you since the evening of his accident.”

“I will, of course, do any thing you like, Lonel; but, having you and Olivia, I don’t see how Mr. Farquhar can want me.”

“You will be, at all events, a novelty, Alice.”

“There is that to be said, certainly,” she answered, preparing to rise by shutting up her book.

“I don’t think Julian is quite so well to-day,” Colonel Dacre went on. “I know of nothing so sweet and so soothing as your cooing voice, my dove. If you will read to him or sing to him—Do you dislike the thought of doing so?” he questioned, perplexed by the expression that overcast her face.

“If I do, I ought not, so please believe I don’t,” pleaded Alice. “It would indeed be ungrateful of me to dislike doing any thing I can do for Mr. Farquhar, when I remember—” That sentence was only finished by a moistening of Alice’s eyes.

Colonel Dacre stretched his hands out to help her to get up, and when she stood beside him, holding his arm, she added,

“It is only that I am so stupidly shy, I suppose. And that I can’t fancy Mr. Farquhar can really care for any thing I can do, when he has you and Olivia.”

“Has the poor little thing been feeling itself neglected, and as if nobody wanted it?” was asked with smiling tenderness.

“I hope I was not quite so foolish; but, to tell the truth, I’m not quite sure. I have felt rather lonely and forlorn the last week or two; rather shut out and left to myself.”

With this answer—with the increased moistening of Alice’s eyes, the deepening of her blush, and the way her cheek was pressed against his shoulder, Colonel Dacre was any thing but displeased.

“As you make confession, Alice, I will do the same,” he said, “and own that probably it is all selfishness that makes me want you to join us in Julian’s room—just that I don’t want to have to do without either of you.”

Alice’s smile was happy now, and as if smiled out of a free heart. They went together slowly, choosing the most shady ways to escape the intense power of the afternoon sun, toward the house. Julian’s study faced the south-east;

seemed dim and cool after the blazing heat just outside the hall door. Julian was lying on a couch in the window, dressed, because he could not yet move his arm enough to get it in and out of a coat-sleeve, in a loose white Indian dressing-gown, which seemed to throw a white light upon his pale face. Olivia sat near him, knitting; she seldom had unemployed fingers. Julian, watching her, was thinking over the last thing they had spoken about, and, at the same time, was studying the peculiar effect of the green reflections, from sun-illuminated grass and tree outside, upon her silver-white hair. Julian never tired of studying Olivia; every changing expression, and every gesture of hers, seemed to have for him some peculiar interest.

One day, after they had become very affectionately intimate, Julian said to her, in a suppressed voice,

"I try to dare think, Miss Dacre, that my mother, of whom I have no memory, may have been something like you."

"Your grandmother, you should rather say," had been her laughing answer.

Julian, as he now watched Olivia, presently saw a surprised—by no means a pleased—look come into her face, as, at the opening of the door, she looked past him, and saw who entered. He turned his head, of course, to find out whom this look greeted; then, either from surprise, pleasure, or, perhaps, because of some interpretation of his own put upon Olivia's look, he flushed feverishly. Olivia noted the flush. Julian wondered whether Alice had really changed; if not, why he had not admired her more before. It seemed to him that now, as she came toward him, her hand still on Colonel Dacre's arm, there was a quiet nobility and gracious womanliness about her which he had thought her quite wanting in before; and she looked wonderfully lovely. Colonel Dacre brought her up to him, as he might have brought anything else very precious to himself, with an air of happy generosity, in nothing ignorant of the value of what it gives, but because of that value the more happy in giving.

"You two have not met since that memorable evening," he said; "and on that evening, Alice tells me, she did not even try to thank you for what you did for her in saving me."

"And I am not going to try now," Alice interposed, more quickly than she usually spoke. "I know it is not a thing for which Mr. Farquhar would like any one to thank him, because—"

But here Alice came to a pause, and the soft flush deepened on her face. Her hand was in Julian's; he had forgotten to release it, marveling at her extreme beauty, and waiting to hear what she might be going to say. Her blush reminded him to let her hand free.

"What is the 'because?'" questioned Colonel Dacre.

Alice lifted her sweet eyes to his face, as if and it easier to speak so to him.

"The 'because' is that you are, I know, so dear to Mr. Farquhar that he might feel it a mockery, almost an impertinence, to be thanked for having saved your life."

"That is well felt, Alice," commented Colonel Dacre, proud and pleased; "but—"

"But," interrupted Julian, "the fact that in saving him from danger I served you, Miss Fairfax, may well have given what I did an added sweetness."

"It seems to me high time," spoke Colonel Dacre, "that you two dear children should leave off being 'Miss Fairfax' and 'Mr. Farquhar,' one for the other. It would sound far pleasanter and more natural to hear you call each other 'Alice' and 'Julian.'"

"They are not children, Walter, and it is absurd to talk as if they were."

Those words of Miss Dacre's were spoken with such a harshly vibrating voice, so out of harmony with the mood of the others, that their effect was startling. Miss Dacre's eyes, too, had an angry light in them.

Colonel Dacre looked at her displeasedly.

"It is true, Olivia, that they are not children," he said, "but they are the two who, yourself excepted to be set between them, are my dearest in all the world. Besides this, after what happened the other evening, what one did and what the other felt, they should have, inevitably, an affectionate friendship for each other that would make the use of the formal 'Mr.' and 'Miss' between them an absurdity even greater than I was guilty of when I called them children."

Olivia, after a moment's silence and inward conflict, said humbly, and it seemed to them sadly also,

"You are quite right, brother, as you always are."

On which Colonel Dacre, looking at her very lovingly, kissed her hand, and there was peace. But it was not immediately that Alice and Julian complied with Colonel Dacre's wish, and called each other "Alice" and "Julian." They effected an unconscious compromise by avoiding the use of any name in addressing each other. And yet neither of them ever had any difficulty in knowing when Julian or Alice was spoken to by Alice or Julian. The first time Alice called him Julian, Julian was startled to find himself thinking that no man had ever before had so musical-sounding a name.

When Julian was down stairs and among them all again, looking white and delicate and, with his arm in a sling, altogether, as Grace expressed it, more "dreadfully interesting" than ever, even sensible and unimpressible Grace couldn't help doing her part toward spoiling him. If she found herself alone with him, so that there was no one else to give him any assistance, she couldn't help being watchfully alert in his service. In fact, Julian was treated by the whole household as a young prince, even more loved than honored, might be treated by subjects and courtiers. The servants

disputed among themselves for the doing of any thing they could do for him. There was one flaw in his happiness. Being so young, having, in all probability, a long life before him, Julian was naturally impatient of delays and hinderances in the execution of the work he desired to do, and Mr. Mostyn told him it might be weeks yet before he could use his pen.

On hearing this, Colonel Dacre, who seemed to be always seeking about in his mind for fresh ways to please and to indulge Julian, said,

"But surely, if you are strong and well enough in yourself, as people say, to work, you could get on with an amanuensis! I wonder we haven't any of us thought of this before! I'm afraid it's not much use my offering my services—"

"Considering you yourself are often puzzled to read your own writing, I should think not," answered Julian, laughingly.

"Alice is my only admirer in respect to my handwriting," Colonel Dacre said. "She considers that it is both easy to read and good to look at. But we will find some one to write for you. For Olivia's hand, I can only say it is too like my own. And, besides, she is always in so much request, I don't know at what part of the day she could be sure of being uninterrupted for an hour."

"Grace, you write a very good and very legible hand," said Miss Dacre. "You must be Mr. Farquhar's amanuensis."

Olivia spoke quickly and decidedly.

"Indeed, Aunt Olivia, I can't possibly spare the time. I have so much to do just now at the schools; and, besides—"

"I could not think of trespassing upon your time, Miss Dunn. I will just wait. It will be good for me to have my patience exercised just now in regard to a thing I am disposed to be impatient about."

"I am ashamed of you, Grace," spoke Olivia, hotly. "It's too hard, considering what we all owe to Mr. Farquhar, that you should grudge him an hour or two of your time."

"Don't be too severe, Olivia. Grace is thinking more of a reason she doesn't than of the one she does give. That is—what would Tom Blatchford say?"

"There is Alice," said Grace; "why can't Alice do it? Alice has nothing particular to do of any kind. And Alice writes—"

"The prettiest and the clearest hand of us all," interrupted Colonel Dacre. "Well thought of, Grace! Though I demur to your statement that Alice has nothing particular to do of any kind. If all the gracious and charitable doings of Alice's day were to be left undone, I don't know which among us wouldn't feel the difference. But I am quite sure Alice will gladly make time to help you, Julian."

"I will not hear of it. I couldn't think of it. It is very good of you to offer it, and of her to be willing, as I know she always is for any kindness, to fulfill your offer; but I could

not think of troubling her." Julian spoke hurriedly.

"Alice would neither feel, nor fancy, nor find it any trouble," persisted Colonel Dacre, and his eyes claimed from Alice some confirmation of his words.

"That is quite true," Alice assented. "I have plenty of time, and it will please me very much if I can be of use to you. Do let me try!"

Olivia's heart, for once in her life, felt hot and angry against her darling, on whom Colonel Dacre beamed one of his sunniest, most approving looks, before turning to Julian; then he said,

"You can't resist such sweet and such sincere pleading."

"But indeed I feel I ought to resist it. And I feel that Miss Dacre thinks I ought."

Olivia hesitated. Her brother's eyes were fastened on her now, controllingly, as well as Julian's, inquiringly. She tried to speak carelessly, saying,

"I don't think it will be good for Alice to be sitting, and stooping as she does when she writes, long enough to be any use to Julian."

"And I am sure Miss Fairfax has no idea of the troublesomeness of what she is so good as to be willing to undertake—not that I mean that I think she would be deterred by that," Julian added, in rather an embarrassed manner.

"Alice is not one to shrink from a little or a good deal of troublesomeness. I should like you to-morrow to make the attempt of letting her write to your dictation. If it answers, you can repeat the experiment; if not, no harm is done."

Colonel Dacre said this in a manner that prevented any further controversy on the subject.

Julian looked forward to the morning with pleasant and yet uneasy excitement. He had some troublesome consciousness, or conscientiousness, which found Miss Dacre's disapproval of the scheme not unreasonable. But yet the temptation, so pressed upon him by Colonel Dacre—a twofold temptation, appealing to the young author's impatience to be at work, and to something less strong, as yet, but sweeter and more subtle—was too powerful to be resisted.

For the first time in her life Miss Dacre was feeling, just now, that she did not understand, could not approve, was not in harmony with this beloved brother of hers. She seemed, also, to be dimly conscious of some change going on in him. She fancied that there was sometimes a slightly feverish and forced excitement about him, and an irritability (shown only toward herself, and, doubtless, only to be perceived by such love-quickenened eyes as hers) strongly in contrast, however slight in itself, with the usual calm sweetness of a temperament which had made her think always of him when she read the words of an Arabian poet about his hero—

"Sunshine was he
In the winter day;
And in the midsummer
Coolness and shade."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE LIBRARY.

"O Menschenherz, was ist dein Glück?
Ein räthselhaft geborner,
Und, kaum gegrüßt, verlornor,
Unwiederholter Augenblick!"

WITH his own hands Colonel Dacre moved Julian's books and papers from the study, where he had worked before his arm got disabled, to the library, where he was now to let Alice work with him and for him.

The library at Heatherstone was the most beautiful room in the house. Its lofty roof was of richly-carved oak, as were its paneled walls, and the book-cases by which they were nearly hidden. Its hangings and furniture were all dimly rich. Altogether, the warm harmony of subdued color pervading the room was that of autumn woods, not when in full gorgeousness, not under brilliant noonday sunshine, but when under a softly-clouded sky, or when slightly veiled by falling twilight.

No new thing, with but one exception, in the way of upholstery, had been brought into this room for many a long year. The carpet was of a kind to outlast more than one generation, and the heaviest step fell upon it noiseless as upon soft, deep moss.

The room had three large mullioned windows, the arched tops of which were, like the windows of the corridor up stairs, of old stained glass that had probably served in some ancient church or abbey before one of the Dacres had made use of it here.

The completeness of the room as a picture was much spoiled by what, for practical use, was an added charm—a large door-window at one end, opening on to the south terrace, just opposite to where a balustraded flight of steps led down into the rose-garden. Near this window was placed a luxurious little low chair for Alice, the only modern thing in the room. Alice often sat here when Colonel Dacre was busy writing at the table close by, from which he could look up and see her. Colonel Dacre liked to fancy Alice always sitting there, with sunshine falling round her, and that beautiful background. When Alice was not in the room, and when the colonel was more gravely occupied than usual, the door-window would be shut, and a heavy curtain of faded crimson velvet drawn across it.

On the morning when Julian was to be established here, with Alice as his secretary, that window, standing open wide, let in the mellow-glowing end of summer, with browning tree-tops warm against a stainless sky; let in the cawing of rooks, the cooing of wood-pigeons, the distant sea-suggesting murmur of the sun-steeped pines, the sunny scents of sun-burned late roses, of jasmine, of clematis, of musk, and mignonnette.

"What a room this is!" Julian exclaimed, admiringly, to Colonel Dacre, who was installing him.

"If you like, Julian, you shall have the key, so that when you leave off work you can lock the door, and know your properties are safe from disturbance."

"Indeed, I'm not going to monopolize your particular kingdom in that way! An empty drawer to push my papers into is all I want."

"These are all empty—I cleared them for you last night."

"It won't succeed, I'm sure, Dacre," Julian said, with a touch of something rather like petulance in his voice. "I'm going to make the attempt to gratify you, but I know it won't succeed. I never dictated a line in my life, and a young lady is not the sort of secretary one can use as a mere machine and think nothing about. The idea of the trouble I'm giving her, and the way I'm engrossing her, will be quite enough to check all freedom of thought."

"If you find it so, of course there the matter ends," answered Colonel Dacre; "but I prophesy that it will succeed so well that what is begun to please me will be continued to please yourself—your authorship's self. Alice's interest in the subject will help you not to fear that you are boring her."

Having surrounded Julian with every thing he could think of that he was likely to want—having arranged a chair, a desk, a foot-stool for Alice, Colonel Dacre said,

"And now I will fetch the little lady herself."

At that moment Julian was seized with an impulse toward further remonstrance, such remonstrance as must be final. But he checked the impulse, pronouncing the feeling which had dictated it to be absurd, perhaps worse than absurd—cowardly and unworthy. But, during the few nervous minutes of waiting for Alice—why they were nervous minutes he did not feel quite sure—he experienced a kind of vexation against Colonel Dacre, for the first time in his life, for his—what? He could have tried many epithets, and would have rejected them all. Stupidity, generosity, simplicity, folly, blind trustfulness of his friend, arrogant self-confidence and security.

Had Julian's love for Colonel Dacre been of a less reverent kind, it certainly would have been the less reverent of these epithets which Julian, just then, would mentally have applied to his conduct.

When Alice was brought into the room, Julian said to her,

"We both act this morning in obedience to our beneficent tyrant, but this will be the last, as well as the first, tax of this kind I make upon your patience. I am sure I shall not be able to work till I can write with my own hand. I shall be much too conscious of your trouble to be able to concentrate my thoughts."

"That will be paying me the very bad compliment of not believing in my sincerity when I say I shall feel it no trouble," Alice answered, as she sat down, and began, in a business-like fashion, to occupy herself with pens, ink, and paper.

"There is one stipulation I should like to make, Julian," Colonel Dacre said—"that Alice's manuscript should not go into the hands of the printers."

"Every word she writes for me, if she writes at all for me, shall be re-copied."

"Have either of you any commissions? I am going to ride over to Monkstowe this morning, to attend a meeting."

Alice looked up quickly, rather apprehensively. "I thought—" she began, and then she paused.

"What did you think, Alice?" asked Colonel Dacre.

Alice blushed a little, because what she had been going to say—"I thought you meant to stay with us"—seeming too childish to be said, she substituted for those words others, saying, "I thought you meant to let me ride to Monkstowe with you this afternoon."

"When I spoke of that, dear, I had forgotten this morning's meeting. But we can find a pleasanter ride for this afternoon than to Monkstowe, Alice. The valley-roads are hot and deep in dust. A canter on the turf will be much pleasanter."

Alice's picture to herself of how the morning was to be passed had shown her Colonel Dacre at his usual place, occupied with his correspondence, while she wrote for Julian at some other part of the room; the room being large enough to admit of this without any necessary disturbance by Julian of Colonel Dacre.

But Alice was too much ashamed of the "childishness" of such shyness as made her cling in this way to the protection of Colonel Dacre's presence voluntarily to say any thing which should betray it; nor did she show any thing of it in her manner, which was simple, grave, and contained. A few more minutes, a few more words, and then Colonel Dacre left them, to begin their work.

Julian proceeded to busy himself with notes and note-books and other books, turning them over with his left hand, as best he could. Alice quietly waited, wishing to help, not knowing how to do it, till presently noticing the worried, distressed look of Julian's young face, she suggested,

"Perhaps you are not yet well enough for work?"

"It isn't that," answered Julian, leaning back in his chair, and lightly passing his handkerchief over his forehead; "but I can see it's no good to try to go on till I've the use of both my hands. I need to be continually hunting up quotations, turning over books of reference, consulting dictionaries, looking back at what I've already written—in short, thank you very much for your kind wish to help me—pray don't think I'm ungrateful; but I find I can't be helped."

Alice felt herself dismissed—whether most relieved or reluctant to be so she could not have told; but after a moment's hesitation she *replied loyally, saying,*

"But Lonel will be so disappointed;" she proceeded to plead. "Tell me what to look for, what you want found, what you want done. Let me bring the books you want, and find the places in them for you. I could help you in that way. We had better try not to disappoint Lonel. Don't you think so?" she questioned, responding to a smile of Julian's, which she did not understand, which meant something of admiration, almost fond, of her, and something of envy of Colonel Dacre.

"Indeed I do! I will try to learn a little of your patience," affirmed Julian. Then, to please her, he began to explain what the doubt or difficulty which had stopped him had been, and told her in which book, and under what heading, it was most probable she would find any thing on the subject. After about half an hour of patient and intelligent search, Alice had hunted out for him what he wanted. He spent another half an hour in reviewing what he had last written, and after that he got up, began to walk to and fro in the room, and by-and-by, at last, proceeded to dictate.

Then things began to go smoothly. Julian left off being apologetic and ceremonious, and ceased to feel ill at ease. The getting to work again did him good. He brightened up more and more. In leaving off being apologetic and ceremonious, he did not leave off being carefully anxious not to overture Alice; that carefulness coming out of a sweet-blooded courtesy of consideration for others which was too much a part of himself to be forgotten or remembered in proportion to the more or less of his interest in something else. But Alice assured him, with a face of such bright earnestness that he could not do otherwise than allow himself the pleasure of believing her, that she was much too interested to be easily tired. Once she asked some question about some passage she was writing, which made Julian pause a moment in surprise before he said,

"Why, you will be my critic as well as my secretary! Please put a large mark of interrogation on the margin of that page. I must look into that."

When Colonel Dacre returned from Monkstowe, three hours after he had left them, Alice was still writing, Julian still dictating. Alice's fair face was softly flushed. Julian looked particularly animated and happy.

"I have a guilty consciousness that I have been exorbitant!" Julian exclaimed, when Colonel Dacre came into the room. "But it was a good long while before we made any beginning. Had it not been for some one else's sweet, wise patience, no beginning would have been made at all. But, thanks to that, I have got on quite astonishingly well. You will confess you are tired now?" he added, looking at Alice with affectionate and somewhat patronizing approbation.

"No, indeed, not tired; but no doubt it is time to leave off. It is so very interesting," she said, looking up into Colonel Dacre's face;

on which she immediately exclaimed, pityingly, "It is you, Lonel, who are tired."

"A little; the morning was close and sultry in the valley."

"And," she questioned, "is that all? Hasn't something happened to pain or to worry you?"

"What could happen on a ride to Monkstowe and back to pain or to worry me?"

As he said this, smiling down into her face, the expression she had been struck by—of harass or of pain, either mental or physical—vanished.

"Come out with me for a few minutes' fresh air before lunch," he went on; "there is a pleasant little breeze stirring in the lime-walk. It went to my heart to notice just now how the lime-trees are changing, yellowing, already."

"Already!" echoed Julian. "There never was so short a summer!"

"Just my thought," assented Colonel Dacre, as he helped Julian to put away his books and papers. "But we needn't count the summer gone for the yellowing of a few lime-trees or the browning of a few beech-leaves. The long drought will make the tints change early." To himself he added, "Nor need I, for the melancholy echoing of those words of Olivia's last night, count this summer, which is nearly gone, as my last summer."

They—that is, he and Alice—passed out on to the sunny terrace. Colonel Dacre took Alice's hand, drew it through his arm, and held it against his heart with something more like passionateness than was at all usual to him. Not that there was not passion in his nature, deep wells, from which hardly a drop had been drawn, but that he was always so strictly under his own soldierly discipline and control.

Julian looked after them somewhat wistfully. He had thought of darting after them to take Alice her hat or sun-shade, but the sunny head, which had seemed to him to attract too much of the sunshine, soon passed into cool shadow; and, after monopolizing Alice all the morning, Julian thought he would not follow her now; but, looking after them, he touched Alice with more tenderly-appreciative judgment than he had done yet.

Alice talked a little more than was her custom, and did not at first notice that Colonel Dacre talked somewhat less than was his wont. Alice told him what she had been writing for Julian, repeated how interesting it was, assured him how glad she was to be useful to Julian, and most innocently showed that she was in a little flutter of pleasant excitement. But presently Alice became aware of some slight difference from his ordinary manner in her companion. Checking her unusual talkative-

ness, she questioned him of his ride, of what he had done, whom he had seen, what had happened.

"I am trying to find out what it is besides the weather that has tired you so badly, Lonel."

"You are fanciful about me this morning, sweet," was his answer, spoken with his usual caressing tenderness of manner.

When they all met for lunch, in the pleasantly-shaded dining-room, he had thoroughly cleared up; even Olivia did not detect any trace of the languor which had struck Alice. After lunch Alice asked if she should dress for riding, or if Colonel Dacre were not too tired to ride again.

"I am not by any means too tired, but I have been thinking that Julian, who can not ride, ought to have some of the fine moor-land air this afternoon. How shall we manage that?"

"I'm quite equal to climbing up on to the moor on my own feet," asserted Julian.

"If you tried, you would, I expect, find yourself mistaken. Grace, what do you mean to do this afternoon?"

Grace, suspecting that she was about to be asked to drive Julian, made haste to say,

"I should like a ride, uncle, but I don't care to drive. I have been too busy to ride during the last week or two. This is one of my few leisure afternoons, and I feel as if a ride would do me good."

"Then we will all four go out together. I will ride with Grace, as she is bent on riding; and you, Alice, will, I know, drive Julian. Old Snowball, in Olivia's little phaeton, will take you about on the turf safely and pleasantly."

It was so arranged, in spite of some wistful appeal against this arrangement in Alice's eyes. Miss Dacre, who had an invalid friend staying with her, was sitting with this lady on a part of the south terrace, to which had already reached the shadow of a great cedar, growing at its western end, when the party started. Olivia gazed after all that was dearest to her in the world with a passionate yearning and sadness over her face. Alice looked back, and, noting Olivia's expression, did not feel easy till her arms had been round Olivia's neck, and some fond words had been spoken between them. Olivia's friend was softly purring out,

"It would be difficult to imagine a prettier pair, or one better matched, than your Alice and that young Mr. Farquhar."

"Why, Martha, what are you talking about?" Miss Dacre said, so sharply as to startle her friend. "There is nothing of that kind between Alice and Julian, and no more chance of it than if Alice were already married."

BOOK IV.—DRIFTING.

CHAPTER I.

"IS IT WISE?"

"You're a right woman, sister, you have pity,
But want the understanding where to use it."

"WALTER, what do you mean? Is it wise? Is it right? Do you know what you are doing?"

These questions had been asking themselves so constantly in Olivia's heart, during the last few weeks, that at last they forced themselves into words. She had come noiselessly into the library, and noiselessly close up to her brother's side, as he stood looking out of one of the windows. Claspings his arm with both her hands, resting her cheek against his shoulder (this old Olivia had strangely youthful ways with those she loved), she asked those questions in a little, almost breathless, gust of passion. Her eyes could see what he saw, and what she saw provoked her to speech.

Colonel Dacre—who, just now, was, politically, a good deal occupied, trying to secure the return, as one of the county members, of a friend—had just come back from Monkstowe. No one had known that he was yet back, Olivia had come upon him by accident. What he was studying was the group upon the lawn. Fair Alice, in her white morning-dress, was the chief light of the picture. An Ophelia-like figure. Her hands, with her work in them, had dropped upon her knee, her head was a little raised, the expression of her face was of intent listening, while her eyes gazed straight before her out into the evening sky. Daylight was just beginning to fail, and the fairness of that rapt young face seemed both to attract and to reflect the soft, fading light, as a white flower might do. Julian, lying on the ground near her, was reading aloud; now and then he glanced up at her. Grace was with them, a little in the background. She had been sketching, and now paused in her occupation of putting away her brushes and colors to attend to the last lines Julian would be able to see to read.

Colonel Dacre knew what the book was; he had read it, and he had left Julian reading it three hours ago when he had started. It was "Mirëio"—that simple, lovely, and most pathetic Provençal love-poem. Julian had so thoroughly and appreciatively studied it in the original that he was able to give a fluent and graceful English rendering of it.

At Olivia's touch, at Olivia's questions, Colonel Dacre had not started, neither had he

stirred, except to put his hand on his sister's. Now, when Julian closed his book, and evidently spoke about it to Alice, Colonel Dacre said,

"I won't affect not to understand what you mean, my good sister. As to wise—there are different kinds of wisdom. As to right—yes, I do think that what I am doing is right. I think, too, that I know quite well, very clearly, what it is that I am doing." His face had a curious, grim mixture of mirth and melancholy as he spoke the last words.

"If she were already your wife you would not act in this way?" whispered Olivia.

"Good heavens, no!" was answered with suppressed energy. "But," he then went on to say, very quietly, "from no mistrust, no doubt of either my wife's or my friend's honor and loyalty, but from fear of imperiling their peace and happiness."

"Is there not now reason for the same fear?" Olivia still spoke in a whisper.

"No, Olivia, because no harm now done need be irreparable."

"Brother, I don't understand you. Don't speak riddles to me; tell me plainly what you mean, what you are thinking, what you are intending?"

"It is hardly here, and now, that we can speak of such things."

"To me you have no need to do more than hint them. I shall be quick to catch the sense of what you say."

"For one thing, then, Olivia, I do not mean to make that fair child my wife while she only thinks she loves me, as girls love their lovers, because she does not know what love is, and is ignorant of almost all the world of other men. I think to do so would be mean and wrong. I intend that she should know and choose. I believe that I would give Alice to Julian—perhaps it is more straightforward to say that I believe I shall give Alice to Julian, without insurmountable anguish, when I am certain that Julian can, as is so natural, make Alice more happy than I could make her."

"Julian make Alice more happy than you could make her! Julian be any thing to Alice when weighed against you, Walter! Oh! it is not for Alice that I have any fear, but I do think that you are ungenerously and unjustly, in order to satisfy your own morbid scruples, endangering young Julian's happiness!"

To this, spoken in a tone of profound conviction, Colonel Dacre only answered with a —

"You don't believe me," Olivia persisted—"no matter; time will show. But, Walter, how comes it that, all at once, you are giving yourself up to the possession of sad and wild thoughts and fancies?"

"There is no wildness in the thoughts and fancies that have grown upon me gradually, Olivia; if there is sadness, well, sadness is not at all times in itself an evil."

"Not for the young and careless; but you, brother—you surely have had your share of shadow and sadness, and should now know something of sweetness and sunshine."

"If such is God's will, so it will be," was said by Colonel Dacre, in a profoundly reverential manner.

"And it surely must be His will," broke from impetuous Olivia. "Indeed, I have no fear as regards my Alice. Her love for you, having grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength, is too deeply ingrained, too completely part of herself, to be lightly shaken."

"I don't doubt, thank God, but that Alice will always love me. But with what kind of love? There is love and love, Olivia. From the first day they met, even before they met, when I knew they were just going to meet, I felt sure that Alice and Julian must love each other. My hope was that unrestrained familiar intercourse, as between brother and sister, might cause the love between them to be such as is between brother and sister. This hope may yet be realized. I don't say it will not be. We shall see. To one thing I can not be blind, that, under Julian's influence, Alice is blossoming out as a flower-bud blossoms into a flower in genial sunshine. You and I, Olivia, have been too old for her, in danger of letting her too soon forget and lay aside all youthful light-heartedness."

Colonel Dacre spoke with a measured quietness, through which even Olivia could hardly detect the intensity of his consciousness of the difference to him implied by the coming true of this or of that almost coldly-spoken-of contingency. In just the same tone he went on:

"I can not imagine that I could endure to contemplate the surrender of Alice to any other man than Julian. To Julian I can imagine myself not only able to surrender her, but unable not to do it, should I be convinced that it is for the happiness of both. I believe Julian to be as completely *sans tache* as is the child herself."

Miss Dacre was awed by his quietness. It made all exclamation, contradiction, remonstrance seem foolish and futile. The feeling came over her that her brother would be inexorable and inflexible, deaf to all pleading of hers for himself; that what was to be would be, and she had only just to stand passive, and see providence work out its work in the lives *around her*.

Hiding her eyes a moment on the shoulder his beloved brother, she sighed out a silent

prayer for his happiness. When she lifted her head again, she expressed a dreamy sort of wonder whether about this young Julian there was not some bewitchment, something which fooled them all into loving and valuing him far beyond his real worth. She could not understand how she had been able to take so calmly even a hint that her Alice could ever be the wife of any man but her brother, for whom, it now seemed to her, she had reared and nurtured Alice from the beginning.

Meanwhile, the group upon the lawn was moving. Grace, assisted by Julian, toward whom, since his accident, she was less ungracious, had finished putting together her sketching properties; Alice had folded up her bit of embroidery, and they were all coming toward the house. Dinner was to be late to-day, because Colonel Dacre had expected to be detained late; but it was getting toward dinner-time now. Alice, suddenly aware of Colonel Dacre's presence at the window—there was just light enough left to show her his face there—smiled such a lovely, complete sort of smile of welcome as seemed to him to illumine all the space between them, and as made Olivia say, in low-toned triumph,

"Does Alice, God bless her! smile in that way for any one but you, Walter?"

The brother and sister passed out on to the terrace to meet the home-coming group. Colonel Dacre lifted Alice's face between his hands and kissed it—a rare demonstration—saying, as he did so,

"Bless you for that smile of welcome, you sweet, good child!"

CHAPTER II.

A HAPPY AFTERNOON.

"O Lieb, o Liebe!
So golden schön
Wie Morgenwolken
Auf jener Höhn!"

"Wie herrlich leuchtet
Mir die Natur!
Wie glänzt die Sonne!
Wie lacht die Flur!"

ON the same day on which Miss Dacre and her brother had had that little talk, by the post that came in at dinner-time Julian got a letter from Mrs. Burmander. It was now past the middle of September. Julian was just beginning to dispense with the sling in which he had so long worn his arm, but the arm was as yet weak and stiff, and Alice was still his amanuensis. The weeks had flown with Julian since he came to Heatherstone—he had "never in his life anywhere been so happy," as he frankly stated to any one who cared to hear him.

Now Mrs. Burmander wrote to say that she and the general were coming back to Greythorpe immediately. The accounts Julian had received from them had been far more consist-

ently good than he had expected. The general had some reason to triumph in the complete success of his scheme. His Marian had experienced a wonderful respite from suffering. But now the weather would soon be growing unsettled, and the general wished to bring his invalid home to Greythorpe for a rest, while they held consultation where they should winter. The light went back out of Julian's tell-tale young face as he read of this immediate return. He himself was surprised and shocked to recognize how the prospect of leaving Heath-erstone darkened the other prospect of seeing Mrs. Burmander and the general again. He remained preoccupied with self-reproachful self-questioning for some minutes after he had read the letter; and during those minutes he was watched, though he did not know it, both by Olivia and by Colonel Dacre.

When he had roused himself, and had quite frankly expressed his regret, mingled with pleasure, Colonel Dacre said,

"Even if you feel obliged to leave us at once, Julian—and I don't see why you should, for, evidently, they can get on well without you—you might still, while you can not use your own hand, be driven over every day for your morning's work with your little secretary."

"You are quite too good to me," Julian answered, gravely. "But I feel as if I had already overtaxed Alice's time—I won't say her patience, for I fancy that is inexhaustible."

Just then no more was said on the subject.

Colonel Dacre was missing for a couple of hours in the later part of the evening. He returned just as they were all beginning to think of going to bed, and told them he had ridden over to Greythorpe.

"I thought I should like to make sure that the servants there were ready for their master and mistress. Knowing the general as I do, I was not much surprised to find that he and his wife had already arrived; fortunately, every thing was comfortably prepared."

At this news Julian was heartily vexed.

"I ought to have been there to receive them."

"I explained that you only this evening had Mrs. Burmander's letter. The poor old general was quite angry with me because I could not honestly say that I thought his wife looked stouter and stronger. She is anxious to see you, Alice, so I promised that Julian would drive you, or rather that you would drive Julian, over to-morrow afternoon. Julian is to remain with us, however, for a few more days at least. The general, having had every thing his own way, does not seem anxious to be under his tyranny again immediately."

The next morning was wet. Olivia prophesied a thoroughly wet day. But by eleven o'clock it began to clear, and after lunch the weather was perfect, fresh and jubilant, clear-shining after rain; the dust was laid on the road, and washed from grass and tree; it was

just an exquisite phase of that exquisite time of the English year—September.

"And what are you going to do, Lonel?" Alice asked, as Colonel Dacre, settling her in the pretty pony-carriage, expressed his pleasure in the loveliness of the afternoon for their drive in a true-ringing voice that had nothing in it to trouble the sunshine of the sunny time. Alice was looking very happy, but the words were not without wistfulness.

"Work, Alice," he answered, cheerily. "I am a slave till this election is over. I must work in the spirit of those words of the old Greek, which some one has translated—

'Work as though work alone thine end could gain,
But pray to Heaven as though all work were vain!'"

"A capital motto for any of us for our life-work!" said Julian, as he seated himself beside his fair charioteer, with a very life-enjoying expression of face.

Colonel Dacre looked the harness over, as was his habit, then gave the word for their start. He watched them out of sight. Alice did not forget to turn round and wave her hand to him just before the last corner was turned.

It seemed to Alice to-day as if her ponies trotted along full of joy in their work and of love for it. She never once needed to take her whip from its socket.

The road lay chiefly along hill-top lanes, with wide margins of moor-land turf, dotted with great gray boulders and with scraggy hawthorns, and adorned with a profusion of harebells, of blooming thyme, and other hardy upland wild-flowers. Once the road crossed the open moor, where the air seemed most vivid life, and the marvelously mellow sunshine a thing of which one desired to preserve the remembrance against dark days to come—that, knowing such brightness and beauty had been, one might believe it would be again.

And here Alice had a little fright. The air seemed to intoxicate her steeds, and their pace became faster than Julian, responsible for Alice's safety, thought safe. Alice could not, for the moment, control them when Julian told her to pull them in; her fright was lest in his anxiety to help her he should injure his still weak arm; but a pull of his vigorous left arm brought the ponies immediately to their senses.

Once the road dipped into a shallow, musical hollow, through which ran a fern-fringed, forget-me-not bordered stream. Julian, when he got out to walk up the ascent out of this hollow, gathered a handful of the flowers. He did not offer them to Alice, but somehow, something his eyes said, happening to meet hers as he laid them on the seat of the carriage, quickened the beating of Alice's heart.

Julian, this afternoon, was sunny as the sunshine itself. His manner to Alice was unconsciously caressing, his eyes were full to overflowing of unspoken tenderness; and yet not one word that could, by any possible

have been perverted into love-making or flirtation, was spoken by him to Alice. Therefore there was nothing to put her on her guard, as there was nothing to startle Julian's own conscience, honor, and loyalty.

There were seldom any dangerous silences when Alice and Julian were together. This afternoon he talked almost continuously—talked of things in which he was most interested, and which she found intensely interesting, and Alice, listening, basked in the sense of the sweetness, the pleasantness, the goodness of life, and did not know, was unwarned by any suspicion, that the sweetest sweetness of the soft sunny air—scented with brown sun-burned late honeysuckles, with wild clematis, and the aromatic fresh-mown aftermath—came to her from no outward inanimate thing—from no definite saying or doing of any kind, but just from something touched and stirred in her own heart.

It is difficult in this generation to believe in such ignorant innocence and simplicity as Alice's; but her education, it must be remembered, had been peculiar, and the very fact that she loved and was loved by Colonel Dacre sealed her eyes.

When they reached Greythorpe, Alice gave a little unconscious sigh; she looked lovingly round before she passed indoors, and said,

"How wonderfully beautiful the light over everything is! It is an exquisite, a delicious afternoon."

Julian did not trust himself to answer her, having some vague notion that he might say something a little warmer than he had any right to say. They spent two or three peaceful, pleasant hours with Mrs. Burmander, and then came the evening drive home again.

Mrs. Burmander detained Alice a moment after Julian had left the room, to see that the carriage was ready. Holding both Alice's hands, and looking very earnestly into her face, Mrs. Burmander asked,

"Is all truly well, my child?"

The perfect unconsciousness of Alice's questioning eyes almost, but not quite, deterred her from saying any thing further.

"When I saw your dear colonel last evening, I did not think he seemed so cheerful as he used to be. Nor did I think him looking well. Is all really well, dear child?"

"I hope so," Alice answered, earnestly. "I had not noticed that there was any difference in Lonel—that he was not looking well."

Then those words she had spoken, "I had not noticed," seeming to reproach her with culpable indifference, with selfish preoccupation, with she did not know what, she blushed suddenly, overpoweringly, and her eyes filled with tears.

To hide her blushes and her tears she stooped to kiss Mrs. Burmander, who said,

"You will forgive this freedom from a dysman, dear. Your colonel is one who sacrifice every thing that is his to his

friend. I feared lest, perhaps, this writing for my boy, and all the kindness shown to him, of which I have heard, might, possibly, have taken you too much away from one whose very life you are."

"Perhaps it has," said Alice, candidly. "A thousand thanks for your words. Yet," she added, "when I come to think, it is Lonel who has been so occupied, so much away. I think, too, he overtires himself—about Sir John Lister's election, you know."

"It is just like Walter Dacre to spend himself without sparing, when the reward is to be reaped by some one else. It is time he had a loving little wife to take care of him, Alice. He is not of the strongest now, he has gone through too much. God guide and guard you, child!"

At the solemnity with which these last words were spoken all color fled from Alice's cheeks and lips.

Alice went bewildered away; bewildered by her own changed sensations. It had been such a happy afternoon, and now the strangest reaction set in. All had seemed so good, and now all, and especially she herself, seemed so different from good. Her heart felt heavy, a melancholy languor overpowered her.

What could it mean?

The one thing she was distinctly conscious of was a longing to see her Lonel, to see if she could find any change in him, to put her arms around him, tacitly to ask his pardon for her unconscious fault. She stood in the late sunshine on the door-step, drawing on her gloves in a sort of dull dream. And this mood continued even after they were in motion. When Julian spoke, his voice seemed to come from far off.

"I'm afraid you're very tired, Alice," Julian said, noticing the great change in her, the pale stillness and grave silence.

"I don't think I can be tired. What have I had to tire me?" was Alice's absently-spoken answer. She was looking straight out in front of her, with a hopeless expression on her face. Not that she was feeling hopeless, she was simply bewildered. And yet her face took upon it that hopeless look!

"Something is the matter," Julian urged, with tender concern. "I don't know if you are tired or not, but something is the matter."

She did not turn her head, and therefore did not meet his eyes. Her answer was true and simple.

"Yes. I feel that something is the matter," she said. "I am trying to find out what. As yet I don't think I quite know what it is."

"You are not ill?"

"Oh no, it is nothing of that sort."

"Of what sort, then? This is very mysterious. Such a sudden change! Won't you tell me what you partly know or think is the matter?"

"I will try, if you wish. It began when Mrs. Burmander said to me, just when she was

bidding me good-bye, that she did not think Lonel looked well, and did not think he looked cheerful. I think I must feel as I do, because I am so grieved, so ashamed, that my eyes should not have been the first to see any change in him." Alice said no more, because a sudden sob broke her voice.

Julian questioned no more. The grave heaviness of spirit which had lightened for Alice since she had spoken lay upon him. He seemed suddenly to have so much to ponder, that he had only just begun to recognize the presence of something in his mind needing to be thought about, when they drew up at Heatherstone.

Julian's innocence of evil and his guilelessness were, though not so complete, more wonderful than Alice's. He had rejoiced to find himself increasing in loving reverence for his friend's lady-love; this had been one of the sources of his happiness in this happy time. He liked to like any thing his friend liked, he would love to love what his friend loved, laying this love at his feet.

The humility of his self-judgment and his exalted estimate of his friend had alike prevented him from suspecting any rivalry between himself and Colonel Dacre, and would continue to prevent this, even after a consciousness that all was not as it should be within his own heart had been awakened.

CHAPTER III.

"WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"

"Cet homme juste avait un caractère timide en désaccord avec sa forte constitution, mais il ne manquait point de la persistance des hommes du Nord. S'il entrevoyait toutes les difficultés, il se promettait des les vaincre sans se rebuter; et, s'il avait la fermeté d'une vertu vraiment apostolique, il la tempérait par les grâces d'une inépuisable indulgence."

ALICE looked anxiously at the windows as they drew up at Heatherstone without seeing any thing of Colonel Dacre.

"Lonel must be out," she said.

She did not seem thoroughly convinced of this, however, but was in haste to look for him. She stepped from the carriage before Julian could help her, as soon as a groom was at the ponies' heads, and flitted out of sight; he did not exactly know where she had gone, he did not attempt to follow her.

She had gone to the library, where, if he was at home, he expected to find Colonel Dacre. He was sitting with his back to the glass door, which still stood open—for the evening was warm—and through which she entered the room.

He had been writing; she saw a little pile of letters ready for the post. He was doing nothing just then. His arms were on the table, his head was resting on his hands. He was stooping forward. It struck Alice that his attitude was one of dejection—that the room looked chill and gloomy, and he solitary and

sad. Alice moved softly to his side, she put a hand upon his arm, and knelt down by his chair.

"You, Alice! Home again already, my darling!" His arm thrown round her gathered her to him, and for a moment he rested his cheek upon her head. "I didn't hear the carriage. The roads are soft after the rain."

But Alice withdrew her head that she might look at him.

"Already!" she echoed. "Why, I have been away a long, long time."

"Did you feel it long, Alice?"

"Not while it was passing—except the drive home."

"And that seemed long? Why?"

"Because I was in a hurry to get home to you."

"Why?" he questioned, not without gentle irony.

"Because Mrs. Burmander said to me that she thought, when she saw you yesterday, you did not look well or seem cheerful."

"The fancies of a sick woman," Colonel Dacre interrupted, brusquely, and with a tone of annoyance; for something in Alice's face made him think, "I fear the mischief is done. I fear Mrs. Burmander has, by some word, done what I forbade Olivia to do—has troubled my child's unconscious quiet-heartedness." By-and-by, however, he doubted if any such mischief had been done.

Alice went on: "When Mrs. Burmander said that, every thing seemed to change, and my heart began to ache, and it has ached ever since."

"The dear little heart is too sensitive!"

"If you are not well, and if you are not cheerful, it is I who ought to have been the first to notice it, Lonel. So I began to reproach myself, and to think that I had been letting other things, and, chief among them all, Julian's work, too much engross me."

There was no added tinge of color on Alice's face as she said that; it was uplifted, and her eyes met his frankly.

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, my good child," he hastened to assure her. "Has not all you have done for Julian been done at my request? I am sorry poor Mrs. Burmander should have troubled you with her sick fancies. I was tired last evening. My ride to Greythorpe was in addition to my day's work. I should be grieved indeed, Alice, to know that any thought of me ever stands between you and any pleasure and brightness your life would otherwise have. You are very young yet, Alice, while we—Olivia and I—have had our youth."

"What has that to do with any thing I have said, Lonel?" The girl's voice had a touch of sharp impatience.

"A great deal, dear, if you only knew," he answered her, very gently.

Alice was wistfully studying his face, straining her eyes to make out its expression.

was in shadow, while hers caught the spiritual sort of light caused by the mingling of moonlight with the end of daylight. After some moments of silence, during which things she did not know she had noticed were remembered by Alice, and thoughts of the germs of which she had been unconscious sprang suddenly full-grown to life, she said, very timidly and plaintively,

"Lonel, it seems to me that you have changed a little toward me lately. Why is it, Lonel? Is it only that you are so busy? Or is there any other reason? Is there something that you are not quite pleased with me about?"

"I can answer you at once, Alice—that there is nothing I am not quite pleased, and more than pleased, with you about. But tell me, dear, how am I changed? What do you mean?"

She did not immediately answer. She pondered a few moments. Then she touched his hand with her lips before she said,

"It is as if you had left off wanting to have me always with you. Or as if you were trying to teach me to do without you."

"You are fanciful this evening, little Alice. Mrs. Burmander has infected you. I must not let you go to her again. You know, dear, how busy I have been during the last weeks, and not about any thing with which I could associate you. Would you have had me take you with me to the Town Hall at Monkstowe, for instance, Alice? I like, as you know, to go thoroughly and heartily into any thing I undertake. Electioneering certainly can not be done by halves! And so you are jealous of poor Sir John?"

He took her face between his two hands, and smiled into her eyes—eyes so deeply blue, and so darkly shaded, that they often looked blue. No smile of hers answered his; he was not deceived, therefore not satisfied. He went on:

"Is not the fact of my being so busy, joined to the other fact that I could be sure you were pleased and interested even when I was not with you, enough reason why I should lately have been less exacting?"

"Exacting!" she echoed. Then she asked, in rather a forlorn little voice, "Do you want me to be pleased and interested without you, Lonel?"

"How can I frame my answer to such a question?" he replied, trying to speak as if he were in jest. But the next moment he added, gravely, and the full deep tone of his rich voice so thrilled Alice that she shivered, "I want—I hope I want—first and chiefly, whatever shall be for my Alice's most true and most lasting happiness."

Alice drooped her head and was silent. She was perplexed. She had a feeling as if she needed to say, and to ask, things too delicately difficult to be put into words; so she took refuge in silence.

Colonel Dacre, too, was for a few moments

silent, gently smoothing the golden hair she had ruffled when she pulled off her hat. Then, in a cheery voice, he began,

"Now, Alice, I am waiting to hear all about it. You must have a great deal to tell me—of Mrs. Burmander's travels, for instance."

"You saw her yourself yesterday, Lonel," was Alice's languid answer.

"But I was with her only a very short time, and she was tired. The drive must have been very pleasant this afternoon, Alice. Was it otherwise an altogether happy afternoon?" he questioned, trying to rouse her to talk on trivial matters.

"The drive was very pleasant, and it was, otherwise, an altogether happy afternoon—except for what I have told you, which spoiled the coming home."

As she spoke she lifted up her face, and he fancied he saw some of the brightness of "the altogether happy afternoon" come back into it. Then she asked,

"And you, Lonel—have you not been out at all?"

"No, I have not been out at all." He tenderly mimicked her compassionate tone. "But there is no need to look so pitifully at me on that account, dear. At my time of life, Alice, one's chief happiness, save in very exceptional cases, must come from work. It is you young things who should have plenty of play in the sunshine and fresh air."

Alice was not quick enough to find any thing to take hold of—to ask an explanation of—in these words; but she felt dumbly and blindly smitten and bewildered by them. It seemed to her that Colonel Dacre spoke as if—as if it could only be in some dream of hers that he had asked her, little Alice Fairfax, to be his wife.

Her thoughts lagged behind as he went on talking—telling her about the prospects of his friend, Sir John, at the coming election. When, springing over a gap, they came up with him, he was no longer speaking of Sir John, or of the election, but of Julian.

"We shall miss him very much when he leaves us, Alice, which will, I suppose, be in two or three days. Perhaps, however, you, dear, won't be sorry to be released from your secretaryship? You are, perhaps, growing a little tired of such close work?"

"Oh no, indeed! It is very pleasant to me to feel of use; and, besides that, I am so very much interested in the work."

"Very pleasant to you, I feel of use, and especially pleasant to you, of use to Julian. Any one would feel that. There is such a charm about him. And, Alice, I believe him to be as true and as noble as he is sweet and gracious. I love him so dearly, Alice, and, I believe, so justly, that I don't think there is any thing that is mine I would not sacrifice for his true happiness."

Alice said nothing, not knowing what to say, though he seemed to pause for her answer.

"If it should ever come to a question of sacrifice between us, Alice," he went on, after that moment's pause, "it stands to reason that it should not be he, but I, should make the sacrifice. And then my credit in making would be less than his in willing, as I know he would will, to make it."

"I don't understand you, Lonel."

"Think how young he is, therefore how much he would give up if he gave up any thing; while I—but we won't speak of that. Then Julian is so organized as to feel every thing intensely, while I—of course, the wear and tear of life have taken the fine edge off my sensibilities. Julian ought to be happy. The good things of life ought to be heaped up for him. He ought to be very happy."

Alice had a consciousness of intense melancholy in Colonel Dacre's heart, in spite of the effort at cheeriness in his manner. She said, timidly,

"Lonel, you are not happy! Something is troubling you."

Then, as he did not answer, she changed her tone to one of question, "Are you happy, Lonel?"

"My child, how can I be otherwise, while you love me; or even without your love, if I know you are happy?"

"While I love you!" echoed Alice. "You speak as if a time could come when I should not love you! Have I not grown up in the love of you? Can I be Alice, and not your Alice? Can I be your Alice and not love you?"

Alice's voice was agitated; her words, spoken with soft passionateness, poured balm and comfort into his breast; and yet he answered them, as he had answered Olivia,

"My child, I believe you will always love me; but, Alice, there is love—and love."

When he had spoken that short sentence, he would have given a good deal to be able to recall it. It was spoken too soon; even if it ever should be spoken, this was not the time.

Alice showed wounded wonder. Her color deepened, her eyes filled, her lips parted as if to speak. Then she drooped her head meditatively, and turned very pale.

"I have done it now," thought Colonel Dacre, "what I would not let any one else do."

But in this thought he was mistaken. His words had not raised the images, or made the impression, he believed they had. At that moment the first dinner-bell rang.

Alice, always so obedient, rose mechanically in obedience to its summons, to go to her dressing-room. As she was moving slowly from his side, he felt he could not let her go—at that moment—in this way.

"Alice!" he said, just as she reached the door.

The word was a cry, and his arms were outstretched. She turned, went back to him, was taken into those arms. He could feel that she was, as he was, greatly agitated. He had never before, in all their quiet intercourse, allowed himself to flutter her by his own loss of self-

restraint. And now she was half frightened, painfully and deeply shaken.

How could she guess? she could not guess; that there was something of the despair and anguish of farewell in that unwonted passionateness with which he strained her to his breast.

"It is not, then, that he does not love me as he used to do," thought Alice. "What is it, then? What can it mean?"

"Forgive me, Alice," he said, as he released her.

"For what?"

"Forgive me if I have said any thing that has pained you, any thing that has sounded like reproach."

"I don't understand you to-day, Lonel. But I know for certain I have nothing to forgive. If you have said any thing that has sounded like reproach, it can only have been because I most deeply deserved it."

"It is not so, Alice. You have deserved not a shadow of reproach. Just one thing I would say, Alice—remember, child, in any thing that may happen, that it is not, and never can be, in your power to do any thing for my happiness that is not also for your own. Perhaps you do not now understand me, but you will when the time for action comes. Then remember what I have said, and dismiss from your mind any idea of self-sacrifice for my good, if at any time any such idea should arise. It would be worse than futile, any such self-sacrifice; it would defeat its own object, and bring about twofold, threefold misery."

"When you have time, Lonel, please speak to me again, and explain more fully what you mean."

Alice's tone was humble, but it was also soothing and tender.

"What I mean is so simple, Alice. I want to be happy; to be happy," he repeated. "That is all my meaning."

"Then you, my Lonel, must be happy," she answered him, gravely, with a slight but quite perceptible accent on the "my." And then she left him, amazed.

It was a full-grown woman, no child, no mere girl, or so it seemed to him, who had spoken those last words. It seemed to him that Alice's face had had something angelic in its expression as she said them. Dare he take home their suggestion of infinite joy?

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE RIVER.

"What's this? what's this? Is this her fault or mine? The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most? Ha!

Not she; nor doth she tempt."

THAT same evening, before dinner was over, Tom Blatchford, like a fresh, wholesome west wind sweeping through a previously somewhat sultry atmosphere, broke in upon Heatherstone.

Grace was the only person whom his appearance did not take by surprise. She was quietly triumphant in the knowledge that he had not been able to endure more than three months of the self-banishment which was to have been so indefinitely prolonged. She and Tom had met in the grounds the day before, and there had been a reconciliation. But she had kept her secret; even though the reconciliation had been so complete that she had given Tom her promise to marry him soon, "if he would be good." Tom was in gloriously high spirits. He was looking robustly handsome, and Grace felt very proud of him; nevertheless she could not help treating him in as repressive a style as if she had taken for her model the "Scornful Lady," who says,

"Believe me, if my wedding-smock were on;
Were the gloves bought and given, the license come;
Were the rosemary branches dipp'd, and all
The hippocras and cakes eat and drank of;
Were these two arms encompass'd with the hands
Of bachelors, to lead me to the church;
Were my feet in the door; were 'I John' said;
If John should boast a favor done by me,
I would not wed that year."

This was not the first meeting, as we know, of the two young men; but they had hardly been brought into any thing like close quarters, one with the other, before. Mr. Blatchford, after contemplating Julian from a respectful distance, something as a rough Newfoundland might a thorough-bred deer-hound, "took to" him with hearty enthusiasm, while Julian cordially liked and admired Tom.

Mr. Blatchford's one idea that first evening seemed to be "to stir them up" at Heatherstone—to arrange for picnics on the hills, or in the woods, excursions up the river, rides, drives, or walks, any thing for movement and outdoor life. The fine weather could not be expected to last more than another week or so at the most, he said; he said that Grace looked moped, that they all did, that the most sensible thing would be to be out all day during the few fine days that might yet be to be had.

His effect upon them all was very much that of a boisterous, not overrude, autumn wind, sweeping out cobwebs, and, for the time, freshening the morbid air of stagnant places.

He would not leave till he had planned, and pledged them all to join in—refusing to excuse either Colonel Dacre or Olivia—an excursion to a ruined abbey some miles up the river. The evening of to-morrow would be the evening of the full moon; so to-morrow they must go, he decided. Some could go by water and some by land; he didn't care which way he went, provided Grace went the same way.

"Her way's to be mine, or mine hers, for the future," he said, significantly. And she said in his ear, quite as significantly,

"If you boast, Master Tom, I will make you pay dearly for your boast."

In the morning it was "Tom's weather," as they all said at breakfast. Not the shadow of

a cloud to give the shadow of an excuse for a change of plan. And, indeed, probably they were all glad that the day's routine should be a little different from usual.

Alice had come down that morning looking pale and tired. She had not slept much, but had not found that the night had brought wisdom or counsel. Her disturbance was, as yet, far too vague. Just a sense of present mystery and of approaching difficulty; of her life having suddenly changed from its perfectly peaceful simplicity, and its singleness of interest, to something more complicated and perplexing. Something, somewhere, was going wrong; when she had succeeded in finding what this wrong was she trusted to be permitted to set it right. Poor little soul! she had too small an experience of life to have any idea of the magnitude of that aspiration.

She had paused in her prayers the evening before, to try to find out how, in them, to touch this trouble; but it had been as if, when she tried to see into the heart of meaning in things, then all her thoughts had folded up, bowed their heads, and hidden their faces, as will the wind-flowers in a southern vineyard when a cold breath from the mountains breathes along their gaudy lines.

After many efforts, with always the same result, she had simply repeated, yet more fervently, her prayers that God would make her good, and Lonel very happy, and so had left the matter.

Every body that day seemed to find Tom Blatchford's tireless fun and good humor infectious. It was a merry day—even a happy day, to them all; even to those who, more or less indistinctly, felt trouble in the air.

Now and then the cloud, and the sense of mysterious evil lying in wait, came down upon Alice, and made her feel timid and nervous. If she were close to Colonel Dacre, and not near Julian, every thing seemed comparatively natural and right; but if Julian's look met hers she felt as if under some crippling, intimidating spell, which made her unable to behave with her usual simplicity and directness. Julian, quick to feel the change in her, and fancying, too, that the to-day avoided him, could not hinder his eyes from once or twice, when they encountered hers, expressing something of pained pleading.

Alice found herself wishing for the day when Julian would have left Heatherstone—wondering if, then, things would be as they used to feel, and be as they used to be.

Just at sunset, when the river, between the black-green alders of its banks, was a river of rosy gold, and the full moon was sending its mellow, convenient radiance up the south-eastern sky, they all gathered together on the little landing-stage previous to starting for home.

"Who would drive, and who would go by water?" was the question.

Grace preferred to drive; Olivia considered herself too heavy for the boat.

"Which will you do, Alice?" Colonel Dacre questioned.

"Whichever you prefer, Lonel. Whichever you are going to do."

"I suspect you, dear, of preferring the river. Am I right?"

"If you will row me, I should like it very much!"

"Of course I will row you, and I, too, shall like it very much," he echoed, with loving, gleeful mockery.

Miss Dacre and Grace got into the Heatherstone carriage, a hostler from the inn standing by the horses' heads. Mr. Blatchford, intending to drive them, sent off the servants and hampers in his own carriage, which, it seemed to him, would not be wanted. Colonel Dacre settled Alice in the boat, wrapping her soft white shawl round her so as to leave her arms free for steering. Just as he was taking up his oars and hugging, with a secret suppressed rapture, the thought of the beautiful hour alone with Alice which was to be his, his glance fell on Julian. He had meant that Julian should go home on the box of the carriage with Tom. It struck him that Julian's tell-tale young face looked wistfully disconsolate as he gazed on the boat, the shining river, and the "shining maid."

Immediately Colonel Dacre said,

"Will you come with us, Julian?"

"If I may. But I am only cargo, lumber—no use as crew, you know."

"We will take you, nevertheless," was the hearty answer.

Julian's face had cleared and lightened, and yet his heart reproached him, as it well might, for weak selfishness.

Then, just as they were pushing off—just as the oars dipped into the water—a little commotion arose on the shore. Mr. Blatchford shouted out that the colonel was wanted to set things right. Colonel Dacre got out of the boat and went to the carriage, to see what was the matter.

"You must drive, Dacre," Tom said, too surely to be ceremonious. "Grace declares that the horses are fresh, the road dangerous; that I have had too much Champagne to know what I'm about; and, in short, that she won't trust herself to be driven by me. She might have had the sense to say this before I'd sent off the coachman."

"I'd no idea you'd have the want of sense to send him off! I knew nothing about his going," Grace answered, angrily.

"Grace, you must get the better of this folly," Colonel Dacre said, displeasedly. "It is just folly, and nothing else! Blatchford is as steady of eye and hand, and as fit to drive as I am."

"Dear Uncle Walter, indeed it is not folly, but reasonable precaution. I am quite sure he is not to be trusted. You don't any of you know the mad nonsense he's been talking."

Grace spoke so earnestly, and flushed so warmly, that Colonel Dacre turned grave eyes

upon Mr. Blatchford, who at that moment looked coldly calm and haughty.

"Will you change places with Alice, and let Blatchford row you?"

"And upset me into the river, in order to have the satisfaction of pulling me out again? No, certainly not. I wonder you can propose such a thing, Uncle Walter!"

"There would be some fun in that!" muttered Tom, a mischievous quiver appearing about the corners of his mouth.

"This is very vexatious, Grace. Blatchford's carriage is gone too far to be recalled. Julian can neither row nor drive, because of his arm. You will allow Tom to do neither; I suppose, therefore, you require me to do both."

"Uncle, I really am very sorry to disturb everybody's plans in this way, but if you knew—"

"The only way to settle it," broke in Tom, "will be to let Jack row Alice and Julian home."

Jack was a lad known to them all, the son of the people who kept the river-side inn. Jack was more at home on the water than on the land, and perfectly to be trusted, as far as skill and steadiness went. Mr. Blatchford had a strong conviction that in making this proposal he was doing as he would be done by—as regarded Julian.

After a little more discussion, after Colonel Dacre had spoken to Alice, and had given some very special cautions to Jack, it was in this way that things were arranged. They were not a happy carriageful. Colonel Dacre was displeased with Grace, whose conduct he thought more selfish and unreasonable than it really was; he was, also, personally disappointed, and he could not forget a certain frightened and reproachful appeal in Alice's eyes. Tom was angry and offended, sat nearly silent on the box beside Colonel Dacre, did not once look round at Grace. Grace resented Tom's behavior, and her uncle's, as she thought, unjust harshness. And Olivia had the troubles of every body on her heart.

Meanwhile the boat was gliding down the river. Jack rowed, Alice steered, and Julian sat opposite her.

"What a selfish, self-willed young woman Miss Dunn is!" commented Julian. "It is quite a marvel to me to remember how much I admired her a few weeks ago. Of course I still see that she is very handsome, but—I don't envy Mr. Blatchford! I should find it difficult to believe in, still more difficult to have any pleasure in, the love of a lady who treated me as Miss Dunn treats Mr. Blatchford."

"But she really does love him," answered Alice, "and the fault is not always all hers. He is very rough and trying sometimes."

Then silence fell. The evening air was balmily soft and warm and still. The glow of the western sky was in Julian's eyes; Alice faced the rising moon. Alice's hat was on her knee. The slight wind of their going ruffled the little golden cloud on her snow-white forehead. By-and-by the hat slipped to her feet. Julian reverently picked it up.

"Won't you take cold? Hadn't you better put it on?" he asked, bending forward to give it to her.

The glance that encountered his was timid.

"Let it lie beside me, please. The lace blows into my eyes, and I can't see where we are going when I have it on."

"And you're not afraid of taking cold?"

"Oh no—not on such an evening!"

He was not himself aware of the tone in which he spoke, any more than of the expression of his eyes. The tone was tender and reverent, as if he spoke from the knees of his heart; while his expression would have told her, had she known how to interpret it, that she seemed to him this evening, sitting there against a background of sunset glory, and with the soft effulgence of the mellow moonlight upon her face, the most exquisitely marvelous fair thing the imagination of poet or of painter could conceive.

Julian looked to the right and to the left; he turned and spoke with the boy behind him; but, in spite of himself, his gaze would come back to Alice; her spell was upon him.

And Alice was so conscious of the intensity of the eyes she tried not to meet, was so frightened at the tumult of her heart which troubled the silence, that it was a relief to her when he broke that silence, saying,

"Would you mind singing a little song I once heard you sing? Colonel Dacre asked for it, I remember, one evening when we were all on the highest terrace—I don't know its name. It was a quaint little fancy, about a lily and the sun and the moon. I have often wished to hear it once more. Would you mind singing it?"

"I know the song you mean. Oh yes, I will sing it if I can."

Alice felt much more ready to cry than to sing, especially that song. It had never had any meaning for her till now. Now, as she thought of it, its meaning flashed upon her. But no, that is saying too much; rather some faint suspicion of what it might mean dawned upon her. The lily, who had all night been looked upon by the moon, who had exchanged fragrant and gentle vows of eternal friendship with her gentle wooer, opens her heart and the golden wealth of her chalice to the warm rays of the morning sun. Something of humility in Julian's way of asking made Alice wish not to refuse.

Alice sang one verse so softly and so tremulously that Julian signed to the boy to cease rowing, the sound of the oars hindering him from catching the low sweetness. This gave Alice an excuse for singing no more.

"We must not stop," she said, "for I know Lonel will be anxious till he sees us home."

"I have often wondered," Julian said, "and often been on the point of asking, what was the origin of that name of yours for Colonel Dacre. May I know? will you tell me?"

"It was my nearest approach to colonel

when I couldn't speak plainly. Lonel liked it, and so I have kept to it ever since."

"I can quite believe Lonel liked it," echoed Julian, with some grimness.

"Sometimes I think it sounds rather foolish now," Alice went on; "but it is pleasant to have a name of my own to call him by. 'Walter' or 'brother' is Olivia's name for him. For Grace he is 'uncle,' or 'Uncle Walter.' For me he is Lonel—my Lonel," she added, softly.

And she said the words in the tenderly-awed sort of voice in which a devotional nature speaks a sacred name.

"Lonel is a most happy invention, and the owner of the name a most happy man," Julian said, with a little unreasonable irritation in his voice, and with a glow of something in his eyes different from any thing she had seen in them before.

A confused sense of misery, of anger, and of ecstasy overwhelmed Alice. If it had not been for the presence of the boy, and also, probably, for some restraining instinct, she might have burst into tears—her heart seemed swelling with them—and have cried to Julian, "What is it? What is the meaning of it? Why, all at once, does every thing seem wrong and unhappy, and yet more beautiful than ever—intolerably beautiful?"

Hardly knowing what she did, ready to do any thing to break the sort of spell upon her, Alice, forgetting all about her steering, stretched over the side of the boat, trying to grasp some water-lilies they were passing by.

"Alice, Alice, for Heaven's sake take care!" cried Julian, throwing his weight as much as he could to the other side, and seizing Alice's arm. Just in time. She had all but lost her own balance and overbalanced the boat.

"I am sorry. I beg your pardon," Alice said, penitently. "I had forgotten what kind of boat we were in; and they looked so wonderful in the moonlight."

"You must forgive me my roughness," he answered, looking at the soft white arm he had not yet released, from which her loose light sleeve had slipped back as she had stretched after the lilies. "I'm afraid I've set my mark here."

Hot and strong was Julian's desire to set his lips where his fingers had been. He was miserably conscious of the traitorous guiltiness of that desire.

"We will get some of the lilies for you without danger of upsetting the boat," he said, as he took his hand from her arm.

"Never mind; it is of no consequence. I think we had better get home."

But the boy had pulled the boat among them. Julian gathered a few of the fairest, shook the water from them, and laid them on Alice's lap.

She did not thank him, but she kept her eyes fastened on the flowers. The next reach of the river they rounded brought them in sight

of Heatherstone, set high above them, with its foreground of softest lawns, its background of rich woods, beyond which, over the tree-tops, showed the line of the moor, looking grand and full of glamour in the perfect moonlight.

On the little landing stage by the boat-house stood Colonel Dacre awaiting them.

CHAPTER V.

MOONLIGHT.

"Brave spirits are a balsam to themselves;
There is a nobleness of mind that heals
Wounds beyond salves."

"Good children!" Colonel Dacre said. "I hardly expected you so soon."

In a moment Alice was beside him, her lilies in one hand, the other in all haste put through his arm.

At once Alice found it easier to breathe; the world was at once a more natural, though a less wonderful world, and she felt a sense of right, of rest, of safety.

The boy was bidden, when he had secured the boat, to come up to the house for his supper. Colonel Dacre gave this order while Julian told him of the narrow escape Alice had had. His arm tightened over Alice's hand, but he did not say any thing. He neither scolded Alice nor praised Julian, but he put his arm round Julian's shoulders. They were all three very silent as they walked up the deep lane and the steep meadows toward the house. But Alice could have talked now; she had lost that painful sense of oppression and of danger.

When they reached the house, Julian at once went indoors. Colonel Dacre detained Alice, who declared she was not tired, for a turn along the drive and through the shrubberies.

"This is like an Indian moonlight, Alice," he said.

"I sometimes think, Lonel, that you must have been more happy in India than you are in England. You sometimes speak as if you liked India better than you like England."

"I had more to do there, Alice."

"Sometimes, too, quite lately, you speak as if you thought it possible you might some day go back to India."

"It is possible, Alice."

"Do you mean to take me there?" asked Alice, emboldened to this question by a desperate desire to clear up the mystery that seemed thickening about her.

"Heaven forbid! My ideal of happy home-life would certainly be life in England, not Indian life. Nevertheless, I am both fond of and proud of my profession; and if circumstances pointed out to me that that was the best thing to do, I could return to the old life and the old work not without a certain sense of satisfaction."

Colonel Dacre's voice was not quite as clear as usual. Something either in what he had said, or in the way he had said it, made Alice

shiver. I suppose there are not many men who, even when they believe themselves to have "quite determined" upon some course of action, fly straight as an arrow to its mark along that course. Colonel Dacre did not.

There were things in his conduct at times that looked irresolute and inconsistent. The nature of man being complex, even when we keep, in the main, along the self-appointed path, we are liable to be drawn aside, now a little in this direction, now in that; we doubt, diverge, and deviate, even though never faltering as to what the goal is we desire to reach ultimately.

"Lonel," Alice said, suddenly, after a short silence, "can't you treat me like a grown-up woman yet? Won't you tell me your thoughts? Can't you trust me, and speak to me plainly?"

"I trust you absolutely, Alice. If there is any one I don't quite trust, it is myself! I have duties to discharge toward you, dear. My relation to you is not quite an ordinary one. I consider myself to be the earthly guardian of your happiness, Alice. I must take care that it is not sacrificed through youthful error and inexperience, or generous rashness and misplaced heroism on your part; and, on mine, the most consummate egotism and selfishness."

"Keep me always with you, always close to you, Lonel! That is how you can best make me happy. It is then I feel safe and good. Make me of use, of use to you—not to other people, but to you. Don't treat me as something you are afraid to touch lest it should be spoiled. Don't try to do without me, and don't make me do without you! Why should you always prefer another before yourself, and just because a thing is precious to you want to give it away?"

"My little Alice!" She was sobbing against his arm. "You are overtired, overwrought! It was selfish of me to keep you out."

"No, no, no. It is not that! Don't always think it is that sort of thing. Don't treat me like a sick child, that for every thing is always to be petted."

"My darling," he said, remonstratingly, for she spoke with growing excitement.

"It is not what you think. At least, it is all quite different from what I think that you think. I am beginning to be woman enough to understand you, to begin to understand you, and, Lonel, it is something more than I can bear! Your goodness—your goodness! Oh, Lonel, never let me go, keep me always with you; when I am with you, I feel calm, and happy, and good; when I'm away from you, every thing comes to feel wrong. Oh, Lonel, hold me tight!"

She clung to him, sobbing and palpitating. The poor white water-lilies, so cool, so fresh, so shining a while ago, were sacrificed between them; they lay unnoticed on the ground at their feet. She clung to him, as if she felt some power, beyond her unaided strength to resist, tugging at her, to pull her from him.

Colonel Dacre, trying to soothe and quiet her, felt a strangely harrowing pathos in her words. Better than she understood herself, he thought he understood her. Being in his way, and, according to his light, a duteous soldier of God, he presently, when she was calmer, said,

"Alice, my sweet child, I am sure you feel and know that, in some ways, every human being must stand alone, so far as human aid goes, leaning on God alone. We can none of us pass through life without passing through trials and experiences in which no human help avails. If such an hour has come to you, you will face it bravely! We are all soldiers, and we must not run away to hide our eyes and stop our ears at the approach of battle."

Pushing her hair back from her eyes and forehead with both hands, Alice looked up into Colonel Dacre's nobly grave face. Some kindred nobility in her, some germ of heroism, something beyond mere girlish sweetness, and almost instinctive dutifulness, was smitten into life at that moment.

"Thank you, Colonel," she said, with soft fervor, "I will try with all my might—" and she tightly clasped her hands—"not to be coward, but to be brave—to be brave and to be good when I am away from you, not only when I am with you. I'm not worthy ever to be with you, not worthy ever to be any thing to you, if I can't be this."

"That is my brave girl!" he exclaimed. "You are all that is sweet and pure and true. You only needed to be brave to be perfect!" After some moments' meditation, he added, "But there may be mistaken bravery, Alice, as I said just now, misplaced heroism. God guard you and guide you! I want you to feel free to come to me at any time and tell me any thing. Most of all, I want you to know that it is out of the nature of my love for you to accept sacrifice from you. You can only love me for my happiness if you can love me for your own. If there is any one thing in this world about which I feel 'I could not bear it,' it would be to have to know that I had come between you and a more complete and more natural sort of happiness. I don't know that you understand me, Alice—I much doubt if you do—but remember what I say, and if the time comes, when the time comes, that you need to understand my words, the understanding of them will come to you."

She was looking at him and listening to him with an intentness that was devout. She was not sure enough of her own comprehension of what he meant, to make him any answer, till she had thought about it a good deal. He did not wish her to make him any answer, or to think about what he had spoken, just at that time, and he hastened to add,

"Now, darling, run through the library, and that way escape to your own room. I should like those dear eyes to be bathed, and that tanned silk smoothed, before any one else sees you."

"I you are! how good you are!"

she murmured, laying her cheek against his breast. "If you don't mind, I don't think I will come down again this evening."

"Better not, perhaps. I will say you are tired, which I'm sure you must be." He took her to the library window, and then she went in and up to her own room.

Colonel Dacre did not enter the house immediately.

"Am I wise? Am I foolish? Should I say more? Should I say less? How will it end?" he questioned; then, after a long pause, "God grant it end for the best—for her!"

He felt sure that, more or less consciously to herself, a struggle was beginning in Alice's heart. Just as, had she been already his wife, he would have felt it his duty in all ways to shield her from temptation, he now felt it his duty to let her be tempted. He had no right, he told himself, to make Alice his wife while she was as ignorant as a child of the kind of influence that might be brought to bear upon her in intercourse with a man like Julian, near her own age, and gifted richly with all those gifts and graces which commend such a man to women.

He was prepared to give up Alice, for her own happiness, and to one whom he loved so well and thought so worthy of her as Julian. He did not attempt to realize what it would be to do it; it was enough for him to know, as he did know, that, once thoroughly convinced of its being for her good, he would not be able not to do it.

But he had not yet, by any means, come to be sure that he should have to do it. It was possible that Alice would not be given up—that the devotion, duty, and reverent affection for him in which she had grown up might be a stronger thing than any love Julian could wake in her. It was possible—he could quite fancy it of Alice—that she would not be able to find happiness in any love that did not go hand in hand with what she held to be duty.

Colonel Dacre valued courage, even in a woman, and he believed he had seen signs of that high kind of courageous determination to go beyond duty, which is heroism, lying dormant in Alice's nature, ready on occasion to spring into life. She was, too, he judged, a creature of so constant a nature that any such new thing as love for Julian might prove feeble to prevail against the deeply-rooted, beautiful devotion of all her young life.

What, then, of Julian? If he, Colonel Dacre, were to bear off the priceless palm of the devoted love of this peerless little lady, was Julian's length of fervid years to be sacrificed to his few? Well, but for Julian, surely the world held other women; no other Alice, but fair, pure, sweet, true, loving women.

Olivia thought her brother looked bowed down and worn that evening. It was a silent supper-table. Tom Blatchford had gone home after a stormy scene with Grace. Julian's thoughts hovered about the absent Alice.

"The child is tired, and will not come down again to-night," Colonel Dacre had told his sister; and the simple words seemed to Julian full of a pathetic and passionate suggestion.

Next morning Alice's eyes sought Colonel Dacre's with such devout vows in them that he felt inclined to bid her veil them, lest they should be seen and understood by any one else. And yet Alice, before she had been able to lie down in quiet that night, had done what any one seeing her do would have thought to be at variance with the spirit of these vows.

When she reached her room she suddenly remembered her water-lilies. As suddenly she felt that she could not leave them lying there, to be found, perhaps, by Julian in the morning, maimed and crushed! She was too pitiful of Julian, or of the flowers, perhaps of both, to be able to endure that thought.

As softly and fearfully as if she had been stealing to a clandestine rendezvous, Alice, when they were all at supper, stole down the stairs and out into the moonlight; she gathered the wounded flowers into the upper skirt of her dress, and regained her room.

Julian, for whom she had an unrecognized feeling that there might be great pain in store, should not have the little pain of finding the flowers he had taken trouble to gather for her lying neglected.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT IT MEANT.

"Oh, that honesty,
That ermine honesty, unspotted ever.
Oh, virtuous goodness, keep thyself untainted;
You have no power to yield, nor he to render,
Nor I to take."

WHEN Alice woke—this was but two days later—on the last morning of Julian's stay at Heatherstone, and remembered that it was the last morning, she believed that she was glad to remember this; or, at least, that she would have been glad but that others, notably Julian himself and Colonel Dacre, were sorry. All possibility of happy ease in their intercourse seemed gone, without her being able to understand why and how. Her manner to Julian had changed; he felt the change, and he no longer looked or seemed happy. Alice was always feeling "sorry" for Julian, and yet was warned, by some instinct, that it was not safe to show this "sorrow."

For some nights, now, Alice had not been able to sleep soundly. Her hitherto so quiet and child-like nature was unused to agitation, and already she was beginning to suffer physically from the few days of inward disturbance.

Now, on this morning, when she honestly believed herself to feel glad, as far as she only and separately was concerned, to remember that to-day Julian would go, in spite of her "gladness" her heart felt heavy, her head ached, she was languid and listless.

Through the wakeful hours of the last few nights Alice had shed some tears; and her weeping had not been without some bitterness of remorse. She accused herself of having fallen short of that undivided allegiance which she owed to Colonel Dacre, in letting Julian and Julian's book too much engross her and interest her.

But even now it had not occurred to Alice to dread that her love for Colonel Dacre could waver, or weaken, or suffer change. That he could have a rival in her heart for her heart's best love, was an idea too monstrous to be entertained. Her exalted estimate of Colonel Dacre, and of the honor and the happiness it should be for her to be his wife, helped to blind her—if, indeed, she were blinded.

Then, too, Alice was not by nature impulsive, passionate, or lightly impressionable; she was more given to the more commonplace and old-fashioned virtues—such as constancy, devotion, affectionateness, loyalty, and truth.

On this last morning, Colonel Dacre took it for granted that Alice would go to her task in the library, as on any other morning. It would have been difficult for Alice to say whether it were most cowardice, or that courage to which she had been recently stimulated; most lassitude, or loyalty, which hindered her from declining, as she longed to decline, to write for Julian that particular morning.

With Julian it had been an intense feeling of the impossibility of giving up these last hours of the exquisitely miserable happiness, or happy misery (for so he had come to feel it), of having Alice all to himself, which had hindered him from listening to the promptings of prudence, and finding some reason for escaping from what he had begun to recognize as temptation. He had made up his mind that this one morning should be absolutely the last of such mornings—that he would resolutely refuse to avail himself of Colonel Dacre's offer of Alice's continued services; and by this resolution he had quieted his conscience.

To justify, or to explain, Colonel Dacre's course of conduct toward these young creatures, it should be understood that Colonel Dacre's views of love, of such love as should be between man and wife, were peculiar; perhaps too exalted and too ideal to be other than absurd and impracticable for the mass of ordinary humanity. What Colonel Dacre called love was not a thing into which noble natures could fall, or not fall, according to the more or less of occasion and opportunity. The love he would desire to have from his wife, the only love that could satisfy him from his wife, would be a love of which he could believe that it was so much his only, that it would not have been had it not been for him! Therefore, if Alice could love Julian better than she loved him, according to his theory she was Julian's, not his. And the sooner they all recognized this, if this is what had to be recognized, the better for them all. Were Colonel Dacre's views universally adopted

ed, there would, perhaps, not be many marriages, but there might be no unhappy ones.

When Colonel Dacre, who had been for a few minutes with them in the library, left them alone to begin work, Alice immediately stretched out her hand to take up her pen from the inkstand, to be ready. Julian's eyes fixed themselves on that little hand with a dim, yet not fully defined consciousness that its kind little fingers had now too close a hold of his heart-strings to let his honor and his conscience draw free breath. Acting on sudden impulse, he took Alice's hand in his, and said, hurriedly,

"I can't dictate to-day, Alice; I'm not sufficiently my own master. It's no use troubling you."

Alice looked up into his face, while he still held her hand; her expression was first only of surprise, inquiry, it was not shocked nor angry; then it deepened and softened with pity (she could not help having pity!), for Julian looked so ill, she thought, so pale, and with such dark shadows round his eyes. Then Julian met that pitying look of Alice's with one so reverent, and yet so passionate, that Alice's lids drooped, and the color stole softly up over her whole face.

"Has no one noticed," began Julian, with irritation and anger in his voice, and in his heart a feeling that there was no one could care for her as he would care, "how more than ever fragile you have been looking lately? Is it that I have let you work too hard for me, Alice?"

The tenderness of tone of that last question contrasted strangely with the almost roughness of the first. Perhaps Alice felt Colonel Dacre both reproached and wronged, for her tone was very cold, as, withdrawing her hand from his, she said,

"I am quite well—there is nothing the matter. It is your fancy." At this tone of hers, such distress and concern came into Julian's face that Alice instantly softened. "It is you who look ill!" she said; and added, rather as if she were coaxing a sick child, "Had we not better try and finish the chapter so as to come to a better place for leaving off, as this is our last morning?"

There was a slight tremor in her voice as she said "our last morning," and perhaps there was moisture in her eyes.

"Why is this our last morning?" Julian questioned, impetuously, resenting the fact that Alice should assume it to be so, without wavering in his resolution that it should be so.

If Julian had not been almost as young, almost as inexperienced as Alice herself—had he not, too, so far shared her exalted estimate of Colonel Dacre, that the idea of successful rivalry was not one that could occur to him as a possibility—his conduct would not have had whatever it now had to excuse it.

"I thought—I believed—you were going home to-day, to Greythorpe," said Alice, in answer to his question. She said it timidly and hesitantly.

"And if I am, don't you remember that Colonel Dacre was so good as to propose—"

"Lonel was, is so good always, but—"

"Perhaps you have forgotten to what I allude; or perhaps you are, by this time, weary of your office. Possibly I have overtaxed your kind patience."

Alice's eyes had been fixed on the point of her pen; she now lifted them to his with frank candor, and said,

"You know it is not so! Why do you speak in that way? You know I am not tired of my office—you know you have not overtaxed my patience."

"If this is true—and I have believed you to be truth itself—why, then, take for granted that this is our last morning of work together? Why should I not drive over, as Colonel Dacre suggested? Why should we not go on with our work?"

"Lonel's suggestions are always for the benefit of others. Should not some one take thought for him? Should not we? You, who are his dear friend, and I, who hope to be his wife?" She had said that very bravely, but now something in Julian's eyes—bent in their full power on her—made her blush and falter for a moment; then she nerved herself to go on, fearing he had misunderstood her. "I only mean that I think I have been rather selfish in the way I have given myself up to the pleasure of being of use to you, and to your book; and I think that, just now, when Lonel is so busy, I might help him, if I tried. You will so very soon be able to write for yourself," she added, in a tenderly apologetic, consolatory tone, "that it won't make very much difference to the time when your book will be finished, will it?"

"And you think, Alice"—he said her name with a sharpness that sounded angry—"that it is only for the sake of the work done for me by your hand that I value the hours we have passed together?"

Alice began to tremble. She did not know of what she was afraid—of him or of herself, but she rose from her chair, yielding to the one impulse she understood, which was to fly—to get away.

But Julian caught her hand. The slumberous quiet of his soft deep eyes was quite broken up, and they glowed with a sort of passionate despair.

"Don't leave me in anger!" he cried to Alice. "What have I done? How have I displeased you? Do you know how you have changed toward me during the last few days?"

"I am not angry—you have not displeased me. I—it—you—Please let me go!" panted poor little Alice.

He dropped her hand. Her face was now white, now red. The red reflected itself on his forehead; he was ashamed.

Alice drove back her agitation, steadied herself; unconsciously conscious of mysterious danger, she rallied all her poor little forces; she thought of Lonel's exhortation to her to

be brave. With a feeling that it was loyal to Lonel, kind to Julian, wise for herself, she said, distinctly, and with a touching, simple dignity, "It is better—I think it is better—that things should be a little different."

"You mean?"

"I think you know my meaning," she answered, quite proudly. "Whether you do or not, if you are generous, and if you are true—to Lonel, I mean, loyal to Lonel—I think you will not press me to speak more plainly about a thing it is so difficult to put into words. It is for your sake that I would rather not."

Alice could not have told at what moment the knowledge was born in her which dictated those words in that manner. To Julian both words and manner carried the conviction that, for the love she suspected, she despised him. This, more than any thing else could have done, lost him his last hold on self-restraint. By speaking out his heart's passionate despair, he could not injure his friend, or lower himself further in Alice's esteem. There burst from Julian the words,

"But I am not loyal! I am a traitor! I love you!"

"I will not believe it!" answered Alice, quickly, in hot anger—"I will not believe it! And," she added, with grief deeper than her anger had been, "I think it would almost break Lonel's heart to have to believe it."

"It is his own fault. Whom but himself can he blame?"

"If it is a fault to trust his friend, it is a fault as noble as himself."

Alice spoke loftily, and moved toward the door. She had no compassion for Julian when he blamed Colonel Dacre. But he followed her, and detained her.

"Alice, for pity's sake, and you have pity, now I have said so much, let me say a few words more! You can think no worse of me."

His tone was now of such humble, despairing sorrow as spoke to the core of the girl's tender heart.

"Yes, I have pity," she said; "it hurts me to know that you suffer, as you must suffer, being so wrong. But why, having already said too much, should you say more? It can do no good, Julian."

Perhaps she had never pronounced his name with more musical sweetness, more lingering tenderness.

"It can do this good," he said, "that you will understand me in the future—that you will not believe me to have been a deliberate traitor, but will know that I was traitorously surprised and betrayed by my own heart. Believe me at least to believe that the full extent of my own madness was only known to me at the moment of my confession of it to you. Will you believe this, Alice?"

"Yes—oh! yes," she answered, and did not trust herself to say more.

The woman and child curiously struggled for mastery in Alice during all that passed be-

tween her and Julian. Her manner sometimes was just that of a kind, good child trying to console another child who has been naughty and is sorry; while at others it was that of a loyal, loving woman, through whose womanhood ran a strain of heroism.

Suddenly Julian's mood changed again, and he said, angrily,

"After all, why should I humiliate myself in the dust? It is not I who am so much to blame—it is Dacre, who has been rash to madness, to cruelty; unless, indeed—" Here a wild hope gave one throb of life, and was immediately stifled. "Rash to madness!" he repeated. "He has tried me beyond what any man not made of marble, whose heart was human, and whose blood was not ice, could bear. Your gentle presence, your sweet voice, your dear loveliness—did he think no man but himself could feel, and hear, and see these things? Alice, what could he mean? of what could he be thinking? Alice, you will not tell me that the fault is all mine, and none of his, if I love you, that I love you?"

Alice, profoundly shaken by the desperate passion of Julian's face and Julian's voice, nevertheless pushed pity aside, roused by this attack on Colonel Dacre.

"Nothing is ever, nothing ever can be Lonel's fault," she answered. "If he erred in trusting you too far, his error was a noble one. He thought too well of you, he whose nature is so far from harm that he suspects none!"

"Alice, Alice, Alice, not that tone! Don't madden me by making me feel how you despise me. Forgive me; tell me that you forgive me."

"Indeed, I don't despise you, Julian. Indeed, I am sorry for you. If I have any thing to forgive, I heartily forgive you. I know," she added, pitifully, "how hard you will find it to forgive yourself." Again she moved to the door.

Julian dropped his face into his hands and believed himself alone. But at the door Alice paused. Her pain in his pain was acute, her pity profound, but it was not this which brought her back. She moved to Julian's side, and she spoke Julian's name. He lifted his face and looked at her. The expression she then saw was one long to haunt her, though she understood nothing of what it meant.

After speaking his name, she paused. That look of his face so shook her, made her heart beat so wildly.

That pause, short as it was, was long enough for Julian, during it, to pass through more than one phase of feeling. First of treasonable, treacherous hope; then of recognition, that the emotion of her face was purely that of purest pity, and of recognition also, that, had it been otherwise, had he seen in those fair innocent eyes any reflection of his own passion, the most precious thing to him in the whole world would have been lost out of it. Alice would have ceased to be Alice, his idea

Alice—deep-hearted for loving devotion, for tenderness and for compassion—adorably child-like in the very perfection of her womanhood.

"Julian," Alice repeated, and before she had added many words to that tenderly-spoken first word, the tears were streaming freely and quietly down her face. "I hope I have said nothing harsh, nothing that has needlessly hurt you. It grieves me very sadly to know that you are unhappy. But because you are good, because you will try hard only to feel and do what is right, you won't be unhappy long. When you have been away a little while you will be able to fancy it was a dream, to forget all that it is better not to remember."

Julian could not suppress the grimmest ghost of a smile. Alice added—her tears blinded her to his smile—

"I will remember, in my prayers, to ask God to help you to—to be good. But, Julian, what I most came back to say was, tell Lonel every thing."

"Tell Lonel every thing!" Julian echoed, looking bewildered.

"Lonel will be deeply pained, deeply sorry," Alice went on. "I would have liked to spare him, but I can't have a secret from him—every thing would feel wrong if I did. He trusts me never to have a secret from him. It will be best you should tell him. He won't be angry. He will know you would have helped it if you could. And he will help you. Lonel can help any one in any way."

"God bless you, you pitiful angel! He shall know every thing. And, Alice," he added, stimulated to rise above himself, "don't let pain and pity for me trouble your sweet peace. My hatred of myself would make life intolerable if I thought it would. I will fight through this trial, rise above this temptation, and be, please God, more of a man, a better man for it. No man could be ever any thing but the better for loving so pure a creature."

With wistful eyes he held out his hand. Alice put hers into it. He held it a moment to his lips, a moment against his cheek; then Alice softly drew it away and fled.

She locked herself into her room and sat down to think about it. To her own surprise, she burst into such distressful crying as she had never cried before. Checking herself, trying to find out the cause of this crying, she murmured, "Poor Julian!" and burst out afresh. By-and-by it was "poor Lonel" around whom her soft pities chiefly hovered, thinking of the complicated sorrow he would have in Julian's sorrow. It did not occur to Alice that in what had happened there was any cause for personal pity—that any of the pain of which her heart was full was for herself.

CHAPTER VII.

GENEROUS RIVALS.

"And in that journey we will bear us so
That each man staring on the rival'd twain,
Shall rub the contradiction of his eyes,
And strain and mutter, 'Which is Galahad?'"

JULIAN, unconscious of time, remained where Alice had left him. He threw his arms across the table, buried his head upon them, and so continued. He was young enough, inexperienced enough, to yield himself up, fully and frankly, to his misery.

Thus Olivia found him. Such an attitude, and the fact, known to her watchful anxiety, that Alice had fled from the library and locked herself into her own room, were enough to assure Olivia that the crisis she had been foreseeing had come.

"My poor boy!" said a voice from behind Julian, the first intimation that he was not alone. Soft and cool hands were pressed against his temples.

This unexpected sympathy was too much for Julian's young manhood. Olivia, standing by him through the momentary outburst of tumultuous emotion, for the first time in her life could have found in her heart to lay heavy blame on her brother.

"You have been too hardly tried," she said, softly. "It was not wise, nor kind, nor just, nor right." Then she whispered, with a heart-pause of dread, "And Alice?"

Julian lifted up his head and looked into her face.

"How can you ask? Alice is Alice!"

"Which means—"

"How can you need to ask what it means?" Julian's tone was impatient. "It means that she is unwaveringly true and loyal."

"Thank God!" said Olivia, fervently; then she added, "Forgive me if my gratitude seems heedless of your suffering, poor boy! Alice is his all."

"Believe me, Miss Dacre, I would not have it different."

"I do believe you." After a pause she went on to say, "You are so young, and you are so richly gifted, all the possibilities of life are open to you. You will conquer yourself, for you are brave, and you will win for yourself some noble kind of happiness, which will have in it no hurting, haunting thought of being gained at the cost of your friend."

"There!" cried Julian, dashing his hand across his hot eyes, and springing to his feet. "Don't despise me, Miss Dacre," and he kissed her hand. "Where is your brother?" was then his abrupt question.

"Must he know?" asked Olivia, reluctantly.

"Alice says so," was Julian's all-sufficient to himself answer.

At this moment Colonel Dacre came into the room.

"The morning's work over?" he asked cheerily; adding immediately, "But where is Alice?"

"Julian has something to say to you." Olivia spoke dryly, and left them together. Julian's pain was bitter in her mouth, as that of a young son in a mother's.

Then Colonel Dacre felt as if sentence for life or death was about to be pronounced on him. He sat down, turning his back to the light, rubbing his hand across his brow and eyes, still further to hide any change of his countenance.

"I have only," said Julian, "to set myself at your feet, and to set your foot on my neck, telling you that, in spite of the love between us, and in spite of the gratitude I owe you, I have dared to love your Alice."

"Ah! how could you help it?"

"That is not all, nor the worst."

"What more?"

"I have let her know my love."

"And she?" Sharp, short, severe sounded that question.

"Can you know so little of her as to ask?"

"You mean she does not return your love?"

Again Colonel Dacre's hand was passed over his face, held this time over his mouth.

"I begin to think it is I who am the more worthy of her!" burst out Julian, passionately.

"My boy, I will not deny that. Are you sure she does not love you?"

"Love me!" Julian laughed a short, joyless laugh, and spoke those words with self-scorning emphasis.

"Are you sure—quite sure?" the older man insisted; on which Julian cried,

"Dacre, are you mad—or trying to make me so?"

"It seems unlikely she should not love you whom we all love." Colonel Dacre spoke in a muffled-sounding voice, still screening his face with his hand.

"God knows that I believe myself to speak the truth when I say that I had no thought, no hope even, that she could love me," said Julian.

There was silence; broken, by-and-by, by Colonel Dacre saying,

"If this is so—if Alice does not love you, it is not you, Julian, who must ask my pardon, but I who must ask yours."

"How so? If you too absolutely trusted to my honor, I can hardly, except in a moment's madness, reproach you for that."

"I thought you must love Alice, but I thought also that Alice must love you. I was prepared—I believe I was prepared—"

"But she does not, will not, can not, shall not, must not love me!" broke in Julian.

"That is what you meant, then!" You noble, foolish, generous, stupid, blundering fellow! You have been dreaming a nice little drama of self-sacrifice—of giving your blessing to the young people, and leaving yourself nothing. I understand it now. But you're wrong—all wrong, splendidly, gloriously wrong."

Subsiding from excitement to dignified gravity, he added, "And I tell you, God knowing that I

believe it, that, if Alice had fallen off from loving you to love me, she would, in so doing, have cured me of my love for her."

Both Colonel Dacre's hands were now slowly rubbing themselves over his face.

Julian, sometimes walking to and fro, sometimes pausing before the table strewn with his papers, was too deeply immersed in thought or feeling to wonder at the colonel's long silence. He looked at the fair lines of Alice's writing, at the pen she had used, at a late white rose which had dropped from her brooch, which had touched the warm whiteness of her throat. Would there be any treason to his friend in possessing himself of that, and hiding it in his bosom?

He started and changed color, when, just as he had taken the flower caressingly between his fingers, the silence was abruptly broken by a question that sounded harsh.

"What are your plans?"

"Plans?" he echoed.

"My thoughts have hurried too far ahead, I see. Of course, as yet, you have formed none."

"While Mrs. Burmader lives I shall go where she goes."

"Her life is probably, at longest, a matter of months. And after?"

"Before I came here I had some thought of going to Africa."

"Why Africa?"

"Because my friend Home is going there."

"For what?"

"To buy land, settle on it, civilize the natives, found a colony."

"A quite ridiculously inappropriate destiny for you, Julian."

"Do you think so?"

"I do, indeed. At least, promise me that you will not take any such step hastily—not without forewarning me amply. You are strangely dear to me, Julian—strangely dear—as dear as a son. I—if any thing should happen to me—"

"What do you mean, Dacre?" Julian asked, sharply. "You are all right? There is nothing the matter with you?"

"No. And yet—in short, some strong instinct urges me to exact a promise from you that you will not go to Africa. In fact, the idea is ridiculous. You, an elegant, highly-civilized, highly-cultured young hero, what is Africa to you, or what could you be to Africa?"

"You are a little cruel to laugh at me."

"I, my boy—laugh at you! Not I. Suppose I tell you frankly what is in my mind—that you should try if you can win Alice, when Alice knows I wish her to be won."

"If so won, when won she would not be worth the wearing. She would not be Alice! It is no use, you generous, proud fellow! This time self-sacrifice is not possible for you. Make haste to be happy, and then—"

"And then—what?"

"And then?—how can I tell? We shall see. Only, then, I shall the sooner"

to love Alice as an honorable man may love the wife of his friend."

Why just now, to-day, Colonel Dacre should speak to Julian on the subject he next touched, he would have been puzzled to tell.

"I have often reproached myself," he began, "for having kept one chapter of my life secret from you, Julian—the short chapter of my married life. You didn't know I had been married?"

"You! you are jesting."

"It is too sad a story to be approached by a jest, even after the lapse of years—almost as many, probably quite as many, as those of your life. My married life lasted barely six months."

"She died?"

"She drowned herself; in the madness of jealous misery—not that I loved any one else, but that I did not love her."

"You did not love her?"

"Not when I married her. I married her from pity, as the only way of helping and saving her."

"That was like you."

"No doubt it was," was assented sadly, "for it was not wise. She loved me passionately. She was a passionate child, in whom, during the few months we were together, I found the promise of a noble-minded woman. But the sudden strain upon her of learning, in my absence, that I had married her in pity, without love, was too great. She drowned herself."

"What a tragedy!"

"I suppose there are many such in life, as unsuspected."

"Does Alice know of this?"

"Only Olivia, who was the innocent cause of the end." After a pause, he added, "She was very beautiful, very loving, and very young. I, too, was young then, but she was seven or eight years younger."

No more was said between them on that subject. A few minutes after, they left the library together by the window. Alice saw them in the grounds.

"He is not angry with poor Julian. How good he is! How good he is!" she thought, and then she cried afresh.

Before they parted Colonel Dacre said,

"Forgive my troublesome, perhaps painful persistence; but are you sure, Julian, quite sure, that you saw no sign, not that Alice loves you, but that she would be ready, at my bidding, to learn to love you?"

"I am sure, quite sure. I'm sure, too, I'm right in saying that, could she be so light as to forget all the gratitude, reverence, duty, and love which bind her to you, I should lose all that is noblest and best in love if I still loved her. No more on this string, Dacre, for my sake, your own, and hers. We are all wronged when you touch it."

"You once said, Julian, that something in Alice always seemed to you more in harmony with the before sunrise half-hour of a summer
morning—
with any other time or season.

Perhaps her sun has not risen, and she does not yet know what love is."

"You can't think so. You are not yourself to-day."

"Perhaps not. But ever since I engaged myself to Alice, I have had at times a strong, strange sense of the wrong to her, and the unnaturalness of a union between her youth and my middle age. Since I have seen you two together, this has increased." He was speaking with a dreariness of tone very unusual in one of his equal temper. "God knows I love her; you all say—you, she herself, Olivia—that she loves me! And yet I don't know what presentiment sticks to me that—"

"You are superstitious! I shouldn't have thought it."

"Nor I."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT ALICE SAID.

"Shall not the people
Say liberally hereafter—"There's the lady
That lost her father, friend, herself, her faith too,
To fawn upon a stranger."

At dinner-time Julian was not there. Colonel Dacre covertly watched Alice. If he found any difference in her, it was that her eyes, when she looked at him, and her manner, when she spoke to him, were a little more noticeably tender, because she knew he had suffered for and through his friend.

"Are you coming out, Alice?" he asked her after dinner. They had dined earlier, to suit some arrangement of Grace's. "The evening is soft and warm; we shall not have many such evenings."

"I am coming, if you are going," she answered, almost gayly, and ran to fetch a light shawl.

To Colonel Dacre's surprise, they had not been many minutes together before Alice began the subject he had been wishing but fearing to approach. She slipped her hand caressingly within his arm, and said,

"You kind Lionel! From my window I saw you with poor Julian, and I saw that you were not very angry with him."

"I was, as I had good cause to be, far more angry with Walter Dacre, Alice."

"No one ever, not even you, has any right to be angry with him. He never deserves anger. If sometimes he makes a mistake, it is because he is more generous, more humble, more noble than any one else in all this world."

Colonel Dacre, looking down on Alice, saw a flush on her fair face, and a bright, keen earnestness in her eyes.

"It is well for you to think as you say," he answered; "but I know the man better. In this instance he has been selfish and inconsiderate. He has exposed one, if not two people, deservedly dear to him, to the chances of suffering to separate him from his ends."

"I will not have you say so."

"I must think it all the more, then, sovereign lady."

So far they had both spoken lightly enough. But this was not what Alice wanted. By-and-by she began, in quite a different tone,

"Lonel, will you be so very good as to speak to me quite plainly about what it is that is in your mind—that has changed you lately, and made you seem less happy?"

"I will try." And then he paused, finding it incredibly difficult to put into words the thought so long familiar to his heart. "You must forgive me, Alice," he said, "if, in trying to speak as you wish, plainly, I seem to speak roughly. Your love for me, Alice, has always seemed to me, in a certain sense, too good to be true, to use a homely phrase. I mean—not that I don't think you true—not that I don't think you truly love me. But, Alice, as I said to you once before, there is love—and love. It is only the love that is what your favorite calls 'the love of men and women when they love their best,' that it could satisfy me and make me happy to have from my wife. How were you, poor child, to know whether or not it was this you could give me? How was I to know? Perhaps it was not till Julian came among us that I troubled myself much with doubtful speculations. Then, when I saw you together, the naturalness that you should love each other made me feel more forcibly the unnaturalness that I, who am old enough to be your father, should bind your golden youth to my gray years. At all events, I felt to need to know—for my sake, as for your own—whether, after knowing intimately such a man as Julian, so gifted and so lovable, your love was still not his, but mine."

Alice was wounded; her voice showed it. It was something like this she had dimly suspected; but to hear it spoken, so quietly, so plainly, seemed to bruise and to wound her.

"All this seems to me very strange," she said. "That you should have needed to try and to prove my love for you! To lose my love for you—and to love any one better than you surely would be to lose it—would be to lose myself, or so it seems to me. And then to love, instead of you, any one like Julian, not much older than I am myself, not so much wiser, or so very much better!" There was a proud, aggrieved, an almost scornful expression in Alice's face till she added, "Poor Julian!"

Then her face softened, and her voice quivered a little, for, as she said "poor Julian," that pale, passionate, despairing last look of his appealed to her.

"Lonel!" she added quickly, with one feeling and another, her heart felt so sore—for Julian, for Lonel, for herself—that she hardly knew what she said, "I can hardly bear to feel myself thinking that any thing you have

done is not right, but surely you haven't been right in this?"

"Just what I said but now. I have not, Alice. And it is on me, and not on Julian, that the suffering should fall. Therefore, Alice, if you can find in your heart any consciousness that, if you let yourself, you could love Julian, don't stifle that consciousness—let it have way."

"Lonel, are you tired of me? are you wishing to be rid of me? I can't feel that you're speaking to the girl whom you have taught to believe you would make your wife."

"It is so difficult, Alice, for you to understand your own heart. It would be so natural that your love should have gone out to Julian. Julian is—"

"Almost a stranger," interposed Alice, hurriedly; "while you—why, you know I have just grown up loving you! Love of you has filled my mind and my heart. There is no room in me for loving any stranger."

"While I believe absolutely in your truth, Alice, it is strangely difficult for me to believe that nothing of your love should have gone out toward Julian."

The tender sadness of his tone, and something in the simple words, penetrated Alice's heart with uncomprehended pain, but she answered in hot haste,

"And if it had, he is so far worthy to be your friend that he would have thrown it back to me. And if it had, I am so far worthy to be your wife that I would have plucked it back again. I would die, and let him die, sooner than be false to you, Lonel."

What was he to think? Only that she was the more deceived?

He only answered her by a pressure of the hand upon his arm. He let those fervid words of hers be the last words spoken on that subject. He let their talk drift to other matters. He kept her out with him in the soft, calm evening, till the flushed face had only its usual delicate but healthful rose, and then they went in to Olivia.

When Alice afterward thought over what he had said, she felt deeply dissatisfied; she did not feel that he believed her; and so great was her faith in Colonel Dacre that to feel he did not believe her was to make her doubt, and ready to disbelieve herself.

When, sleepless, she watched the rising of the waning moon, caught the sweet late summer scents, as a soft breath of the dry warm wind shook the jasmine and clematis about her open casement, she found herself sighing, "Poor Julian!" wondering about him, wishing she could see his face bright and happy once more, and so remember it; and so be helped by that remembrance of it to forget that different, more dangerous aspect of it.

"Poor Julian!" Alice murmured, as at last she fell asleep.

BOOK V.—ALICE.

CHAPTER I.

"POOR JULIAN."

"Wait, and Love himself will bring
The drooping flower of knowledge changed to fruit
Of wisdom. Wait—my faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end."

JULIAN left the neighborhood without there having been any further meeting between him and Alice. Almost directly he returned to Greythorpe, a sudden change to cold weather made General Burmander in great haste to remove his wife. He had planned that they should go first to the south coast of England, then to the south of France. He was ready to fight winter and the world for one more month, week, day, or hour, in which he might keep his Marian, and know she did not suffer much.

Alice had driven over to Greythorpe with Olivia to bid the invalid good-bye. Her hands had been held in Mrs. Burmander's, her face had been earnestly scrutinized by Mrs. Burmander's eyes, Mrs. Burmander's parting words had been a prayer for God's guidance of Alice toward all good; but there had been no confidential talk between them; they had not even been alone. Julian was absent. He had run up to town on the general's business, and was to return next day, to start with them for the South.

As she drove home again with Olivia, Alice felt strangely, unaccountably depressed. She longed to rest her forehead on Olivia's shoulder and cry, but how could she have explained her tears? The parting from Mrs. Burmander was a pathetic pain, yet truthful Alice knew that this was not—she did not, even to herself, pretend to think it was—the pain which caused the hot ache that longed to be relieved by tears. Inadvertently Mrs. Burmander had said "poor Julian" when she spoke of him, and it was those words which had set going that pain in Alice's heart. Poor Julian! Pity for Julian seemed to Alice to be that pain's key-note. That pain kept hold of her; as days passed, and weeks, it was still there. Poor Julian! His pale face, as she had last seen it, would too often be between Alice and her book, her work, her music, and the pathetic autumn beauty of the world. Nothing could have so much helped her to forget him as to have seen him again, even for five minutes, and to have seen him bright, buoyant, active, occupied with other people and other things. That would have wiped out the painful impression which made her thoughts too often painfully busy with "poor Julian."

When Alice was with Colonel Dacre, occupied for Colonel Dacre, as he let her occupy herself, copying letters and documents, hunting out passages he wanted, or pretended to want, extracting from newspapers, restoring order to the chaos that had engulfed his affairs, she was for that time quite satisfied, quite happy, not crossed by any thought of "poor Julian;" that pain was numb.

And then came all the bustle of the long-impending and long-prepared-for election. Colonel Dacre's friend was triumphantly returned, in chief part owing to Colonel Dacre's influence of character, position, person, and purse. Whenever it was possible, Colonel Dacre now had Alice with him. How proud she felt of him, and of herself as belonging to him, when she saw him among other men! What noble dignity she found in all he did—what noble wisdom in all he said—what high-bred courtesy and winning grace in the suave gravity of his manner—what sunshine of heart-goodness in his smile! To belong to him gave value, distinction, meaning, and honor to her life. It could not but bring happiness also. Anyway, Alice could not imagine herself leading a life apart from Colonel Dacre—a life in which she was nothing to him. Whomever else she loved, she surely loved him first and best! If she ever compared Julian with her Lonel, how slight, boy-like, unsubstantial, merely sweet and graceful, seemed young Julian. Poor Julian!

When the unusual bustle and excitement of Alice's life was succeeded by a more than usual quietness—Colonel Dacre had to go to town, and remained away a week—she had to resume her burdensome consciousness of something got wrong which she could not set right, of something lost which she could not recover. The week of Colonel Dacre's absence seemed to her not merely a weary week, but a sinfully wasted and unprofitable week. She failed in every thing she undertook, because of her preoccupation, and yet failed more than in any thing else in coming to any understanding of the real nature of that preoccupation. There could be no doubt in Colonel Dacre's mind of the warmth of his welcome when he came back.

On one of the first evenings after he had come back, when they were all together in the smaller drawing-room, Colonel Dacre's attention was arrested by a little talk about a book which took place between Grace and Alice.

That room, with its soft lamp-light, and its bright wood fire, made, with its inhabitants, a cheery, pleasant picture. At the centre-table,

which was strewn with gay-colored wools, sat Olivia, busy with her Christmas gifts for the poor. She was now again wearing that brown velvet gown which so entirely suited her, and which so thoroughly harmonized with the dim richness of the old-fashioned, home-like room.

On one side of the fire, with a reading-lamp on, a small table, all to himself, sat Colonel Dacre, hidden behind his *Times* from Grace and Alice, who shared a similar lamp and table on the other side. For a wonder, there was a novel, a new novel, in the house, and Grace and Alice were engaged upon different volumes of it. It was a powerfully-written story, by a new writer, who, perhaps, had put into it the passion of personal experience, and might never write any thing more. It was making some sensation, and Colonel Dacre had brought it home to Heatherstone with him.

"Well, Alice, how do you like it?" Grace asked, as Alice laid down her third volume, folded her arms, and gazed thoughtfully into the fire. They were sitting close, and spoke, as they supposed, only for each other. "I do not like it at all," answered Alice, without removing her eyes from the fire.

"And why do you not like it at all?"

"That is just what I was beginning to try and find out. I had got no farther than a resolution to read no more novels."

"Not even such good novels as this, Alice?"

"Is this good, Grace? It is clever and powerful; but it doesn't seem to me good. It seems to me a justification of selfish wrong-doing. Faith and duty are made to seem common, uninteresting, plodding virtues; while to yield one's self up to passion, without any care for consequences, to one's self or to others, is made to be glorious and heroic!"

"What would you have had different? I read the third volume first, so I know how it ends. Would you have had the girl marry her old love, even when she knew that her heart had transferred itself to the other man? Is that how you understand faith and duty? It is not my notion of them. If I left off caring for Tom, if I cared for any one else more than for Tom, I would never dream of marrying Tom, let the world say what it might."

"Of course not!" answered Alice. "But I blame the girl for letting her heart transfer itself. She could have hindered that in the beginning, but she never tried."

"It is so easy to talk in cold blood," replied Grace, "but to act may not be quite so easy."

"I didn't say any thing of what would be easy, Grace—that has nothing to do with it. But she seems to have had no feeling that faithfulness and constancy to the man whom, nevertheless, she is always made to own to be the nobler, and the more worthy of her love, were worth struggling to maintain. All the sympathy of the reader is claimed for the people in the book who let themselves get overpowered by passion, which is inconsistent with duty. Duty is spoken of as if it were a poor

dull thing, a virtue only fit for mean and common people."

"An Old-World, out-of-fashion thing, in short," said Grace. "Now Love is lord of all!"

"But why, Grace, should love, which is always called one of the passions, be treated so differently from any other passion? Why should it not be guided into the right way, recalled if it wander toward the wrong? Why should it not be controlled by reason, and influenced by considerations of honor, gratitude, loyalty?"

Grace was looking at Alice with rather a mocking expression. She was just about to say, "You know very little of what you are talking about," when some movement of Colonel Dacre's reminded her of the possibility that he could hear what they were saying, so she remained silent. After a few moments Alice spoke again.

"If," she said, "this girl in the story had in the beginning made any effort to conquer herself, to resist the passion which she is made to call 'traitorous,' she could have done it. But she never seems to make one effort; yet it isn't that she is taken by surprise, for she is always analyzing her feelings. And then, too, it is so monstrous that she should be described as unselfish, when the fact that she destroys the happiness of the man who loves her so much beyond her worth, and to whom she is bound by every possible tie, never seems to trouble her to any extent that could interfere with her happiness. Surely," Alice went on, in the excitement of the subject, speaking much more than was at all usual with her, "if she had been any thing of a noble woman—and we are told that she was noble—she would have gathered all her forces together, strained every nerve, died—sooner than not conquer herself. But, no; this is what she would have done if she had not been base. A noble woman would simply have found it impossible to love against honor, duty, gratitude, loyalty, judgment, and conscience. What could there be left of her to love with? And then the hero! A man who could lie in wait to make love to, and plot and scheme to win the love of, a woman bound to one he called his friend! Oh! Grace, it seems to me a bad book, about bad people!"

"Uncle Walter, you hear that!" cried Grace, sure that he was hearing.

Colonel Dacre laid down his paper and rose from his chair. He looked down upon the two girls, as if about to speak; then he checked himself, and turned suddenly toward the fire, so that they could not see the expression of his face.

"Are we to have no music to-night, Alice?" he asked.

Almost before he had finished speaking Alice had risen, and was moving toward the adjoining music-room. Of late Alice's devout alacrity in meeting any wish of his seemed to Colonel Dacre to have exaggerated itself to an extent that sometimes pained him. Did

mean that she was afraid of him? Did it mean that she was afraid of herself?

Almost always (though Alice did not know this, as how should she? whether Colonel Dacre knew it or not, as, possibly, he was beginning to suspect it) Alice's treatment of Colonel Dacre was just what would have been beautiful in a devoted daughter toward a father loved with profound veneration; and now this loving veneration was touched to more special tenderness and toned to pathos, as it might be in the heart of such a daughter when she has felt, or is about to feel, the commencement within her of a struggle for mastery between the old allegiance and something new.

Colonel Dacre followed Alice to the music-room, and opened the piano for her. When she had seated herself she turned to look at him, asking, "What shall I play?" He did not immediately answer her. He laid his hand lightly on her head, and looked down into her eyes with an expression that made her heart glow with a noble kind of happiness, and stimulated heroic resolve.

CHAPTER II.

OLIVIA'S "LITTLE WORD."

"I have a heart, but if it could be false
To my best vows, ever to love again,
These honest hands should tear it from my breast,
And throw the traitor from me."

THINGS had outwardly been going on much as usual at Heatherstone for a good many weeks, when Olivia came late into Alice's room one evening. Alice was just ready to get to bed. She was sitting in the pretty blue-and-white room, wrapped in a pale-blue dressing-gown; she had been reading in her Bible, and the book was still open in her hands when Olivia looked in.

"If I disturb you, dear, I will come again presently."

"You don't disturb me. I had finished reading. Please come in."

"I want a little word with you, Alice—a word that is burning a hole in my heart till I speak it. Come to me here by the fire."

Olivia seated herself. Alice took a stool at her feet, leaned an arm on her lap, and looked up into her face wondering.

Olivia did not immediately speak, but sat gazing into the fire. Alice studied the fire-lighted face, tracing its likeness to Colonel Dacre, when suddenly some tricky turn of leaping fire-light, or some devil's device, showed her, instead, what seemed to her an unmistakable likeness to Julian. Alice turned her face aside. This slight movement roused Olivia, who asked, abruptly,

"Alice, what is the matter with my brother?"

"Is there any thing new the matter?" was Alice's startled question.

"It seems to me that there is. Either some new trouble, or some steady increase of a trouble not new." A pause. Then Olivia questioned, "When was the last time that Walter said any thing to you about wishing you to be his wife, Alice? any thing that seemed as if he thought of marrying?"

Alice's color changed from red to pale rapidly. She answered,

"In the spring—early last spring, he spoke of the autumn. When autumn came, he said nothing. Now it is early spring again, and he says nothing."

"In short, then, Alice, he has never spoken of it since young Julian came among us?"

"No, never once since then," assented Alice.

Olivia took Alice's face between her hands, and looked piercingly down into the depths of Alice's eyes.

"Walter says you are thin and pale, Alice. Alice, if you love Julian tell me so frankly. Any thing will be better than suspense. You do not love Julian?" The tone was one that acknowledged and apologized for so monstrous a question.

"You can ask that!" And stinging tears rushed into Alice's eyes. "It is Lonel I love. I love him more than ever! My heart aches with wondering so much about him—what he is feeling, what he is thinking, what he is believing, what it is pains and grieves him, what I can do different to please him, to show him how I love him!" Alice spoke with soft rapidity. "Every night," she went on—"almost every night, I cry myself to sleep, thinking that Lonel looks sad and suffering. Sometimes I feel as if I must go down on my knees and kiss his feet, and tell him I won't leave off kissing them till he lets me know what troubles him."

"Do that, Alice. Make him speak."

"But I think he has said all to me that he means to say. It seems to me I never now have the chance of speaking to him alone; or, if I have the chance, then I feel afraid to use it."

"Your love has not cast out fear, then, Alice?"

"It almost had once, but now— It seems to me that what is so natural has happened. And yet, though I feel it natural, it grieves me very deep down. Am I not right? don't you see it? I don't mean that he doesn't love me—oh, he loves me only too much!—but still, in some ways, I disappoint him. I am too childish. But if he would let me be with him almost always, as I used to be, why then I should grow older and wiser much faster."

Olivia looked steadily into the clear eyes of the fair young thing.

"You are mistaken there, Alice. If Walter does not have you with him as he used to do, you are quite mistaken in this guess at the reason. Child, child, you are the very light of his life! Speak to him to-morrow, Alice. If, when you are on your knees at your prayers,

you are sure, quite sure of your own heart, pluck up your courage, my own girl, for his sake and for my sake, and ask Walter to say when he will marry you."

Olivia waited for no answer; but having kissed Alice, and very fervently prayed God to bless her, went away.

When Alice was left alone, she softly moved about the room for a little while; then she was a long time on her knees: after that she dropped into Olivia's chair. Could she do what Olivia had bidden her to do? She thought she could—she thought she would. Her whole being was at high tension. She did not lounge back in the chair into which she had sunk. She sat very erect. Her hands were clasped tight in her lap—even her feet were arched rigidly, her brows were close knit, and her mouth firm set. She looked a fragile young thing, but it was easy to see that somewhere in the slight, soft, girlish frame an heroic spirit had its home. A spirit indomitable and resolute—"to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

"To-morrow," she presently said, aloud—"I will speak to him to-morrow."

She sat on, thinking, thinking, thinking always of her Lonel; his nobleness, his tenderness, his every virtue. If to-night her thought at all touched Julian, it was only to pity "poor Julian" with a pity that but for its soft sweetness had not been free from scorn.

"To-morrow—I will speak to him to-morrow," Alice, by-and-by, said again, when her to-morrow was already to-day.

She laid herself down on her bed, softly smiling, softly blushing, eager for to-morrow, when she hoped to bring a happy light back into those intense eyes of Colonel Dacre's, a satisfied content to that grave mouth. Hoping this for him, for herself she hoped rest; the rest of being taken into his loving arms—the rest of feeling that he was at rest—the rest of consciousness that things were right, as he was happy.

"It is very long since I have had that rest," she said. "Perhaps that is why I am so tired now—always so tired." It was almost while saying this that she fell asleep.

What had of late so tried Alice was, perhaps, chiefly the strict watch she had kept upon herself. The pain of her "pity" for "poor Julian" did not wear out. She honestly believed that she thus "pitied" him, not so much because he loved where he was not loved, as because he had been so unfortunate as to wrong his friend, to pain his friend. Nevertheless, she would have been better pleased with herself had she been able to banish Julian from her thoughts more completely. That she should love Julian, while to love him meant to be false to her Lonel, whom she could not doubt she loved, was simply impossible. That she should love Julian, while every loving thought of him was a wrong to her Lonel, was a monstrous thing, of which Alice did not suspect her-

self to be capable! A good young wife who, by some disastrous combination of events, had been surprised into too warm a friendship, too eager an interest, in the friend of her older husband, could not have been more strenuous in her efforts at all self-conquest, more severe in self-judgment, than Alice was; and yet it was true beyond all doubt that, if she loved Julian, she had no suspicion that this was so.

In times to encourage by requiring heroic action, Alice might have shown herself a heroine; but in these days those among us who are heroic must be so, for the most part, to their own consciences only, without any show of heroic deeds.

Alice, surely, was right when she argued with Grace that much more than we are inclined to admit could we rule and curb our hearts and inclinations in this matter of Love, as in all other matters.

And yet, perhaps, it were safer to say that idleness, weakness, vanity, selfishness, self-indulgence, moral flabbiness, absence of all spiritual bone and muscle, want, most of all, of any real religiousness, generally have more to answer for than Love, in all morbid manifestations of passion.

"Love, lord of all," has too many follies and crimes committed in his profaned name—his profaned name taken in vain—when some baser name should be used.

CHAPTER III.

TO-MORROW.

"And must the lady be the wooer, sir? •
Suing to you as you should sue to her?
Stooping to take your low up in her hand,
That, seeing it there holden, you may stand
Conscious of worth? Making yourself the glass
'Fore which the shadows of your virtues pass."

COLONEL DACRE was out great part of next day. Alice wearied herself in watching for him, in going to and fro, and up and down, trying to meet him. Vainly, till evening; then at dusk she found him alone in the library. He was seated by the fire in an easy-chair, doing nothing; his back was to the door by which she came into the room. It had been a raw, cheerless, early March day, blowing, snowing, and sleeting. The pleasant fire-light was a good exchange for the sulky, sappy daylight. At the sound of the opening door, Colonel Dacre, without looking round, said, "I did not ring. You need not bring lights here."

The door closed, and he believed himself to be alone, till two arms laid lightly round his neck, a soft cheek just touching his cheek, and that faint perfume of violets which hung about every thing of Alice's, at once convinced him of her presence, and bewildered him, holding him in tranced stillness, afraid to move lest this sweetness should prove to be no more than

a freak of fancy. Alice was the first to speak. If she had meant to begin with the question Olivia had bade her ask, her courage for the moment failed her.

"Why do you sit here alone, Lonel?" was all she said.

"So it is you, your own self, little one! and not only your phantom!" He put his arm round her and drew her to his side.

"I have been watching for you all day, Lonel."

"You wanted me? For what? Why?"

"I wanted you because—because I wanted you! Because you are my Lonel, and I am your Alice."

"God bless you, my darling!"

The tone in which this was said seemed to Alice infinitely sad. Alice slipped down on the rug at his feet. She leaned her arms on his knee, rested her chin on them, and gazed up into his face; and presently the fire-light played her the same trick that it had done the night before, showing her this time what startled her, as being, in spite of difference of age, more sameness than likeness to Julian, in the face at which she was looking. She felt inclined to shrink away. But she did not. She laid her cheek down upon her arms, and turned her eyes to fix them on the fire.

"I never noticed it while he was here," she thought; "that seems so strange."

Colonel Dacre put his hand tenderly upon the fair head, and felt a glow of warmth and pleasure, long a stranger there, gather about his heart. Nevertheless he said, almost directly,

"Had you not better get up, dear child? Shall we go together to the drawing-room, or—had you something to say to me here, Alice?"

"Yes, Lonel, I have something to say to you here. I want you all to myself a little while. I want the rest of leaning here, with your dear hand on my head. It does me good, and I am so tired."

"Are you not well, Alice?" was asked in quick alarm.

"Quite well, only tired. I want rest, and there is no rest for me except when I am close to you. I am tired with being always, for so long, so far off. Why, Lonel, why have you kept me so far off?"

"Are you crying, Alice?" He lifted up her face with very gentle hands and looked into it. It was wet with tears.

"Oh, that is nothing! But this constant aching of my heart—that is something—that is what tires me so."

"That must be cured, Alice."

"I want it cured. And only you can cure it, Lonel."

"I need hardly say that what I can do, I will."

"Then you must be different, Lonel, and not make me feel, as I always feel now, as if I had grieved and pained and displeased you."

You used to be often grave, but you used often, too, to look so dearly, so blessedly happy. But now you have hardly ever any other look than the one which makes my heart ache."

"These are your fancies, my child, or a reflection of your own changed mood. For, Alice, you have changed. The flower that bloomed out so brightly last summer seems to have shut up its petals again."

"You have left me without any sunshine."

"I hope to see brighter sunshine than you have ever known shine into your life before many months are gone."

Alice pondered for half a minute, for half a minute struggled with herself. Then, taking one of his hands in both hers, looking up into his face, unconsciously leaning all her soft, sweet weight against him, she asked.

"Do you mean, Lonel, that you will then let me be your wife, as you promised me I should some day be?"

There was nothing childish in the simple directness with which Alice put this question. Her manner was nobly grave. She was self-justified and fearless, in her own consciousness of unselfish purpose.

Colonel Dacre recognized what this meant; saw far deeper down than Alice could. He experienced a curious shock of acute pain, as if he were learning for the first time what he thought he had long known. That Alice—whether or not she had any love for Julian—loved him, Colonel Dacre, fondly, devotedly, with a love that had no touch in it of the love a girl gives her lover, a wife her husband! It seemed to poor Alice that his face and his voice were more than grave—stern—as he answered her,

"No, Alice, it is indeed not that I mean!"

"Then, Lonel, why is it not that you mean? Why, Lonel, why may I not hope for that?" Alice's voice was sharpened by suffering—his pain, perhaps, rather than her own. Whether his or her own, anyway there was pain and suffering.

"Because, Alice, you are young, and I am old! Because, Alice, there has gradually grown upon me a settled conviction that I should do you cruel wrong if I accepted the sacrifice of all your sweet spring of youth to my sapless autumn. The words are spoken now, Alice! That is well; there need be no more misunderstanding, or half understanding, one or the other, between us. There need be no less love between us, child, but we may both know what love it is. You may relax the strain and stress you have put upon yourself, trying to love me as it is not natural a girl so young should love so old a man. You have behaved nobly, Alice, bravely, and I am proud of you, my good child."

"Lonel, you have spoken, but I, too, have to speak. It is not so much more than a year ago that you promised me to make me your wife soon. I am not that time younger. I love you no less, but more. I will not release

you from your promise, and I don't think I have done any thing that should forfeit my right to its fulfillment."

Olivia's words of the night before—"Child, child, you are the very light of his life!"—appealed to Alice, and, through every thing Colonel Dacre said, she seemed to hear some confirmation of their truth. He did not immediately speak. Alice went on:

"Lonel, can you tell me that it seems to you now less for your happiness that I should be your wife than it did that time ago?"

"It does, Alice."

She looked startled for an instant, then she said,

"Ah! you mean because you think it less for mine. But supposing you knew certainly that I should be very happy—as indeed, I have no doubt I shall be—what then?"

"What then? Why—" His heart gave a great bound; the hot blood mounted to his temples and clouded his eyes. His sentence got no further. Alice said, very softly, very distinctly,

"Lonel, there is no reason, there will be no reason, there can be no reason, why things should change from what they were when we both seemed happy, except for the change that what we looked forward to then should come true." Between tears and laughter she went on—"What a shocking thing you are making me do, Lonel—ask you how soon you will marry me!"

"Beware, Alice, beware, in your unbounded generosity, your innocence, your heroism, you are setting yourself a task too hard for you, or for any woman!"

"What task, Lonel? If you mean the task of loving you, that is a task I came to so early, and have been at so long, that it is no harder than breathing, and it is as sweet as breathing sunshine and fresh air."

She said this with a little tone of tender dignity, and, getting up, moved a little way from him, and stood looking into the fire. Had she prevailed? If not, what more could she say? How could she plead any further? He rose from his chair and stood opposite to her, looking at her—the soft, fair, girlish creature, with so resolute a face. Presently he took both her hands in his, and said, in a voice of profound emotion,

"Alice, however this may end, and I can say no decisive word to-night, I dare not trust myself—too much is at stake! but, however this may end, remember that I hold you to have gone beyond duty, if there is a point to which the noblest of us can stretch that is beyond duty. I mean that—After all, it is impossible for me to say what I mean. I can only repeat that I am proud of you. I can only pray God's choicest, rarest, and sweetest blessings on this dear head!" He pressed her head against his breast a moment; then he made one fresh effort, and added, "Try to be light of heart and of an easy mind now, Alice. Let

yourself rest. Whatever happens, however it all ends, you have done your duty, and more. Happy he or she of whom that can be said!"

Was he resigning her, or claiming her? She put her face up for his kiss. He gave it, then drew her hand through his arm, and asked that she would give him some music. They went so together to the drawing-room, where Olivia sat. Both faces showed signs of late emotion, both looked nobly happy. Olivia's dark eyes flashed her pleasure. Did she interpret or misinterpret what Colonel Dacre's bright elasticity of that evening and Alice's shining, serene content indicated?

Mr. Blatchford dined at Heatherstone that day. Between him and Grace there was wrangling as usual, but Miss Dacre fancied that, on Tom's side, the wrangling had a sterner, more serious tone in it. When he bade Olivia good-night, he said,

"You'll hear of some desperate deed soon, Miss Dacre! When you do, don't blame me or say you were unwarned."

But for a twinkle of fun in Tom's eyes and at the corners of his mouth, Olivia might have been alarmed.

Grace, yawning very ostentatiously, as she put her work together, preparatory to going to bed, remarked,

"Well, our next parting will really be our last, I suppose? We are to have a last ride together to-morrow afternoon. And then, if Tom can't have every thing settled his own way, which I have no idea of allowing, why, then, he says he is going away 'for good and all!'"

"Take care what you are about, Grace. Tom looked serious to-night. You'll never love any one as you love him, and—I don't think you'd be a happy old maid!"

CHAPTER IV.

JULIAN AGAIN.

"Just as we were so happy!" so she said,
And drooped the pretty golden-crested head,
And felt the pressure of a fear unsaid,
Heavy and cold at heart."

At breakfast-time the very next morning Alice found something in Colonel Dacre's face, as he read one of his letters, which made her ask, laying her hand on his arm as she spoke,

"May I know what is the matter?"

For the moment they were alone. Alice had come down before Grace or Olivia, and had just made the tea. Colonel Dacre took Alice's hand from his arm; he raised it to his lips, then held it in his own hand. In his face she fancied there was pity for her as well as grief for himself.

"I have bad news from Fiordimare," he said.

"Mrs. Burmander, it seems, has been gone some weeks. The letter in which Julian told us of this must have been lost. He alludes here to

her sufferings, which, at the end, must have been terrible, as if he had before told us all about them."

Alice did not speak. She knew that this news, though sad enough, was not the bad news she had to hear. She had turned very pale, and kept her eyes fixed on Colonel Dacre's face. Colonel Dacre went on:

"This letter is dated a fortnight since. I have been for some time wondering that I did not hear; but the posting of it was delayed, as a few lines added later explain, by an accident which has happened to Julian. Poor, unfortunate young fellow! It is indeed soon for him to be laid on the shelf again."

"A serious accident?" Alice's pale lips questioned; her hand had made a little start in his.

"That I must go and see; that I must judge of for myself. He makes light of it, as you will find; but these lines written, as I suppose, by the lady to whose house he seems to have been taken, are not re-assuring. I must go myself at once, and see exactly what is the truth."

"Oh! Lonel, must you? Just as we were going to be so happy!"

His grasp of her hand was tight, he slightly smiled.

"I'm afraid you think me very selfish for saying that," Alice went on. "But it does seem hard—I can't help feeling it hard that you never, never, never seem to get any peace and happiness."

This was, in truth, the first aspect of the matter to Alice, or at least the first of which she was conscious. Perhaps there had been a preceding shock of something different, but now she felt more annoyed with Julian than anxious about him. He was going to be troublesome again, and to disturb his friend's repose.

"Couldn't you send a telegram to the doctor, asking for further particulars? It may be something quite unimportant, and it is such a long way for you to go. Do you think you need go at once?"

"I don't think about it, Alice—I know I must go! You wouldn't have me leave the dear young fellow to the care of strangers? Are you so ungrateful, dear, or so forgetful—or so little tender?"

Alice only answered, straining his hand between both hers,

"It seems so very hard, so very sad, to lose you, to let you go—just now."

Miss Dacre and Grace just then came into the room. The news was told to them while a hurried breakfast was going forward; routes, maps, and time-tables were studied; afterward a bustle of preparation filled the morning, though Colonel Dacre could gain nothing by leaving till the afternoon. To make a great stir, to be doing something, seemed to be a satisfaction to them all.

Alice waited on Colonel Dacre, watched

him, and hung about him; her heart seemed to grow heavier, and her spirits more oppressed every hour. She seemed jealous that any other hands should do any thing for him; she insisted on doing for him such things as Olivia would ordinarily have done, and every thing belonging to him seemed to have acquired a new and dearer sacredness. Her tireless feet went up and down for him, and to and fro, or lingered beside him. When he begged her to spare herself and to rest, she answered, with a sort of bitterness in her tone,

"There will be plenty of time to rest afterward, by-and-by, when you are gone."

As she finished saying "when you are gone," she pressed her face against him and burst into bitter crying.

He said to her, among many other things, in trying to calm and soothe her,

"We must hope for the best, Alice. Julian is young and healthy. There is every reason to believe that, with God's blessing, he will pull through, even if, as I fear, it is something serious that has befallen him."

When he said that, Alice stayed her crying. She lifted up her face and looked strangely upon him.

"Julian, no doubt, will do well enough!" she said. "But you, Lonel, you—when will you come back again? I feel as if—as if—as if you would never come back again!" And on that she burst once more into that bitter crying which had been for a moment arrested.

The next word he said was a word that called upon her powers of self-restraint:

"Alice, my darling, this makes things doubly hard for me—and they are hard enough already!"

After that Alice cried no more till he was gone, nor did she say any more sorrowful sayings till he was gone, but there was a new and a heart-rending pathos in their parting; and when he was gone, Olivia was alarmed by the violence of the girl's crying and sobbing, as she threw herself into Olivia's arms—alarmed with more than one kind of alarm. How much pain had Julian in this sorrow? she could not help asking herself.

When Alice was calmer, she said to Olivia, "What is it—and why? I never felt like this before. My heart is as if it would break with the thought that something is going to happen to Lonel—that he is gone forever."

"Good heavens! Alice, child! Take care what you say!"

"Forgive me for saying it! I couldn't help saying it. It seemed as if it would be said."

"You are overtired, Alice, and not well."

"We have seen him start on journeys before," Alice continued, "longer and more dangerous journeys, and I never felt any like this. I seem to know that I shall be Lonel's wife. I have never been able to imagine myself his wife; his child, his servant, any thing to him that was not to be equal with him, but not that—not his wife!"

"Alice, you are morbidly fanciful. Let us have our cup of tea and a walk before it gets dark. Unless you will lie down—will you, dear? Could you sleep, do you think?"

"Oh no, I should like to get outdoors. I'd far rather walk."

"I should think Grace would be home soon," Miss Dacre said, as she poured out tea.

"They did not start till much later than they had intended. Tom kept her waiting till so late. She was almost not going at all, but Tom got so angry when she said she wouldn't go, that Grace was quite frightened."

"She did not go when she bade Walter good-bye, then?"

"Oh no, not for a long hour after."

Olivia and Alice, each making a dreary pretense of cheerfulness for the sake of the other, took their walk drearily through the dreary afternoon.

When they returned to the house, a drizzling rain was beginning to fall, and Grace was not yet home.

One hour passed, and two; it was then blowing hard, and raining in torrents. They began to be a little anxious about Grace. Not very anxious, however, since she was with Tom, whose property she was—who would be sure to take care of her. They settled it that probably Tom, when the weather became so bad, had taken her to the house of his old aunt at Monkstowe. Still they kept expecting to see Tom himself or to get some message from him. It would not be like Tom to leave them in unnecessary anxiety.

The evening wore on. No Tom appeared, and they received no message. Alice was restless. She wandered often into Grace's room to see that the fire burned bright, and that every thing was ready for her when she should come home. A good many fires might burn out and be relighted between now and then!

Every thing Alice did this evening felt to her as if it were done in a dream. The things about her did not seem real things, they were shadows or memories. The reality of things seemed gone out of her life with Colonel Dacre—to Julian?

Poor Julian!

Olivia dispatched a groom to old Mrs. Blatchford's at Monkstowe, to assure herself that Grace was safely there; but, before the groom returned, a note addressed to Colonel Dacre was put into Olivia's hand; which note made her aware that the man would bring back no such assurance!

CHAPTER V.

A LONG WAY HOME.

"Lady, you forced me on this harmless fraud! By your proud humors and tyrannical frowns, Drove me to plot your overthrow. A man, I could not arm me with my manly arms Against a woman. Warring against you, I borrowed your own weapons."

ABOUT the time when Olivia and Alice were first beginning to expect Grace back, Grace had said,

"Surely, Tom, this will be a very long way home."

"Rather long, but safe to bring us home at last—at least, so I hope and believe."

Grace glanced at Tom, and decided he must be thinking of something else. His face looked grim, and his voice hadn't seemed like Tom's voice, which usually rang clear and hearty. He had answered her, too, without looking at her; and yet, at the corner of his mouth, she fancied she detected a peculiar expression—one which had often warned her that Tom was meditating some wild prank. But presently, when he turned and spoke, his face was solemn enough.

"I'm afraid we're in for bad weather, Grace. I've got your water-proof here. You'd better put it on now."

"How did you come by it?"

"I asked for it. I meant that our last ride together should be a long one, and I didn't like the look of the sky."

"Thank you, Tom," said Grace, quite meekly, as he helped her to put on the jacket.

A quarter of an hour after that there was no seeing Tom's face, or much of the road; the thickness of the atmosphere brought night on quickly; and then the wind rose and blew gusts of rain right in their faces. This was more than Mr. Blatchford had calculated upon; he broke into imprecations, hearty rather than polite.

"Never mind the weather, Tom; I don't mind the rain. It never does me any harm to get wet. But it is so dark! I do wish we were near home. You are sure you have not lost the way?"

"Quite sure. It's very good of you, Gracie, to say you don't mind the weather, but I mind it for you. However, all's well that ends well, as this ride of ours will, no doubt. It's no use to cry over broken eggs or spilled milk. The only thing to be done is to push on."

"Though I don't mind the weather, Tom, I do mind the bad language you use about it."

Tom's momentary pangs of tender penitence for a crime as yet only known to himself ceased. There was a good long silence, broken presently by Grace, who said,

"Tom, I'm sure we must have taken the wrong turning. I'm sure we're not getting any nearer Heatherstone."

"I know the country too well for there to be any danger of my losing my way, dark or light," answered Tom, stoutly.

"Then it was very foolish of you, and very wrong of you to choose so long a way when we started so late. I can't imagine what you can have been thinking about." Grace spoke very crossly.

"No," muttered Tom, not very distinctly, "I don't suppose you can. And I'm thankful you can't. Anyway, I didn't think of it raining and blowing in this confoundedly unpleasant manner."

Again silence. Then Tom asked,

"Are you very tired, Grace?"

"Yes, I am very tired indeed," Grace replied, with a sort of savageness.

"And very cold?"

"Yes, very cold indeed. My hands are so numbed that I can hardly hold the reins. It is a fortunate thing that my poor Winnie seems not to have the slightest disposition to run away."

"Put these on," urged Tom, taking off some warm woolen mittens which Grace had made for him, and a warm muffler, which, having been worn inside his coat, was quite dry.

"Indeed I will not. I am not quite selfish enough to do that, Tom."

"It wouldn't be selfish—quite the contrary. If you won't use them, I'll just pitch them into a pond by the road-side. Come, there's a good girl! I've got Winnie's head all safe. Don't hurry. Put them on comfortably. The muffler's not a bit wet; it was inside my coat."

Grace had to yield. She put on the mittens, and Tom managed to tie the ends of the muffler behind her waist, to hold her horse, and to give her a very hearty kiss, almost at the same time.

"Now, then, the road is good here. Let us ride fast to warm ourselves," he urged.

"If I can get Winnie along; but she is very stupid, and keeps stumbling. I never knew her so sluggish, when her head was turned toward home, before."

"Curious," commented Tom, in a suppressed voice that did not sound like Tom's voice. A few moments afterward he burst into long, hearty peals of laughter.

"What a fool I am! A brute, too, you think, Grace!"

"I certainly can't quite imagine what there is to amuse you in our present plight. There! she was all but on her knees. I'm not sure she didn't touch them."

"Confound her! Give her a good cut every minute or so, and keep her awake," was Tom's advice, after he had dismounted and had examined the mare's feet, to make sure she hadn't picked up a stone.

"But, Tom, I'm so tired; it is almost more than I can do to sit up, and I've such a pain in my side, Tom. How far are we from Heatherstone now?"

"Keep up your courage, Gracie. It won't be long before you are able to rest now."

Tom began to feel seriously uneasy. He had not calculated upon such a rough night,

upon Grace's getting so soon tired, nor, last and worst, on Winnie's going lame, as he was well aware she had done. He thought of changing saddles, but he did not know that his horse would carry a lady, and the dismounting and remounting Grace would be formidable in such wind and wet. They had been out three hours, and all that time had been riding away from Heatherstone. They could not, therefore, be less than twenty miles from it, even, although they had ridden slowly, in deep converse, the first part of the way. Tom judged that they must still be three or four miles from Easterwick, which was their destination.

Tom produced a silver pocket-flask.

"Take just a sip from this, dear, to help you along. Wipe the mouth first with your handkerchief."

"Why? who used it last?"

"I did."

"If it is only you, I don't mind. I don't care to wipe it."

"Oh! Grace," said Tom, penitently, "if only you'd always been as good as that to me I'd not have done what I have done."

"And what have you done?" she asked, quickly alarmed, because of her indefinite feeling of something odd and unusual about Tom this evening.

"Many things that have vexed you, dear, besides bringing you this dreary long ride."

Winnie now went so lame that Mr. Blatchford dismounted to lead her; he trudged along ruefully between the two horses, and wished the adventure fairly over, and he and Grace out at the other side of it, with all his heart.

"What lights are those, Tom?" Grace by-and-by asked.

"Lights! those! oh! that must be Easterwick." Tom tried to speak carelessly.

"What are you talking about? Easterwick! why, Easterwick is about five-and-twenty miles from Heatherstone."

"About that. So you have a right to be tired, Grace; you really have had a long ride. I think thirty miles is nearer the mark than five-and-twenty."

There was a little pause, very awful to Tom; then Grace asked,

"Tom, are you mad? What do you mean? If you are making me the victim of one of your disgraceful pranks, I will never forgive you—never!"

Between fright and fatigue, Grace was very near crying. Tom plodded on through mud and mire, and did not immediately answer. Grace tried a coaxing tone.

"Don't tease me, dear Tom. What with the cold and tiredness, I'm quite ill. Don't be teasing. Tell me you don't really mean that we are close upon Easterwick."

"I do really mean that we're close upon Easterwick, and glad enough I am of it, too. I am not mad either, but in my very sober senses."

"You've lost your way, then, after all, and,

after so much boasting, don't like to confess it," Grace said, tentatively and timidly. Then she added, "Oh! Tom, how can we get home to-night?"

"We can't—it's impossible."

"But we must—we will! It shall not be impossible. If I die on the road home, I will not stay at Easterwick to-night. Of course you knew I should not. Why, think of Aunt Olivia and Alice growing more and more anxious every hour, without a notion of where I am, or what dreadful accident has happened to me."

"I have guarded against that. I left a letter to be delivered to them this evening. They ought to have it about this time. It was addressed to the colonel, for I knew nothing about his journey when I wrote it; but, of course, Miss Dacre will open it."

They had each of them to shout their remarks because of the wind and the rain.

"What are you thinking about? What do you mean? If you have entrapped me in this way, if there is no mistake, if you have done this on purpose, I will never forgive you." She spoke in growing excitement. "As long as I live, if I live to be a hundred, I will never forgive you!"

"No hysterics now, Grace." Tom took a tone more like a husband's than a lover's. "And, if you value your reputation, no scene at the inn. We are going to 'The Golden Fleece'; we are expected there. Dismount quietly. Do as I tell you. Reserve your reproaches and your tears for a fitting opportunity. Are you not my promised wife? Don't I mean to marry you to-morrow? Is it likely I shall be careless of your honor? Do just as I tell you to do, and say nothing that will betray you, or it will be the worse for you, and therefore for me, dear." Tom had let Winnie stop, and had come close up to Grace to say this.

Grace was thoroughly cowed, or stunned, by physical fatigue and mental amazement. Tom thought he detected a sound of quiet sobbing.

"When we are in a warm room, and have had something to eat, we will talk rationally," he said. "I will explain every thing to you, and you will find you have nothing to be angry about. Only, be cautious before the people of the house. No demonstrations of any kind—fake every thing for granted. If you care at all for appearances, you will take my advice." Having so delivered himself, Tom went back to Winnie's head, and they splashed and plodded on again.

Tom had spoken with preternatural solemnity; and from this solemnity of Tom's, so opposed to his usual gay and careless manner, all he said acquired a mysterious sort of importance to the bewildered senses of poor exhausted Grace. She even, by a great effort, left off crying, because Tom cautioned her that her tears might make a false impression. But she began at the same time to try to master her thoughts, to make up her mind what she could

do, for she had not the slightest idea of letting Tom have his own way—of just falling in with his arrangements.

CHAPTER VI.

SURRENDER.

"Your mad servant, mistress, is now your master."

WHEN they reached "The Golden Fleece" Grace was perfectly passive. She let Tom take her off her horse, and give her his arm up stairs into a large, bright, comfortable room—the inn's best parlor—where a great wood fire was blazing, and every thing prepared for them. The table was spread with all manner of good things, both substantial and elegant; there was great display of best china and best silver; there were even, on the table and in other parts of the room, bouquets of choice hot-house flowers—azaleas, roses, and lilies of the valley—filling the overwarm atmosphere with an almost overpowering fragrance. Everywhere a profusion of wax-lights. The contrast with the cold, wild, wet, miserable night outdoors was, therefore, as strong as possible.

The light, the heat, and the perfume of the flowers turned Grace faint and dizzy. She sank into the chair to which Tom led her and closed her eyes.

Tom went away to give some special orders about the poor lame Winnie, and meanwhile, the landlady buzzed about Grace, full of respectful solicitudes and offers of service, urging her to go into the adjoining room and let her wet clothes be at once removed—a suggestion which feebly added to Grace's amazement, as she wondered what the woman supposed she was to put on. But, for all answer, Grace shook her head—she had no energy to speak or to move; besides, after Tom's solemn warnings, she thought silence the safer.

Tom came back, talked cheerily to the landlady, who was making the tea, bustled about, and ordered this and that. Grace tried to watch him, tried to understand what he said. But when she opened her eyes every thing danced about in a way that made her deadly sick. She closed them, and there was sudden darkness and silence. For the first time in her life Grace had fainted. She could not more effectually have punished Tom.

When she recovered she was alone with Tom. Tom was on the rug before her, chafing her hands in his. Presently, in spite of her feeble remonstrance, he had pulled off her boots, and was chafing her feet too, and holding them in his warm hands before the fire. When he thought them quite warm he put them on a footstool, which he routed out of some corner of the room. Then he took off her wet hat, and let down her wet hair. His next proceeding was to bring her a cup of tea, and to stand over her while she drank it, which she let herself do, hoping to find that it would rouse her.

"Our last ride together, as it was to have been, will be a memorable one to us, Grace, but by no means the last, please God," Tom remarked.

Grace made him no answer.

"You are not so pale now—you feel better, poor little Gracie!" he next said.

Still no answer, and this not from sullenness, as Tom feared, but because she was trying, with all her might, to gather together her scattered senses—to understand the situation, and to make up her mind what she had better do—what she could do.

Stupefied by sheer fatigue, she was conscious of but one desire—to fall asleep. She knew there was something she ought to be very angry about—something she had to take a resolution about; but the warmth of the fire and her feeling of intense weakness overcame her. Tom's gentleness, and the habitual sense of safety with Tom, soothed her; her head fell back against her comfortably-cushioned chair, her eyes closed, and she fell fast asleep.

"Poor little Gracie! quite tired out," were the last words she heard. "Too tired to scold, too tired to be angry, too tired even to understand!" he added. "So far I've got off better than I could have expected, but by-and-by comes the tug of war! When she wakes refreshed—and I daren't let her sleep long in those damp things."

Tom contemplated Grace's slumbers for a few moments admiringly. The long lashes resting on the pale cheeks, and the loose-hanging hair, made her look younger than her years, he thought, and more soft and tender than he had ever seen her look since she was a child. He heaved a great sigh, almost touched to penitence.

"If I weren't so sure that it will be for her happiness in the end I'd be ready to hang myself," he said.

Tom was hungry, and he sat down to the table, prepared to make a hearty supper. But the notion of possible danger to Grace from sleeping even a short sleep in those wet clothes disturbed him. He stole softly out of the room to find the landlady, and ascertain that the woman he meant should act as Grace's maid had arrived with the luggage.

"An hour ago and more, sir, and the lady's room's all ready—a good fire in it, and every thing comfortable. I begged the lady to go and change her dress, but she's just tired out, seemingly."

"That's it—she's just tired out. When I ring send the woman up."

Mr. Blatchford went back to Grace.

It seemed a thousand pities to wake her, and he would willingly have postponed the battle. She looked so sweet and so lovely in her tired sleep, and he knew she would, at all events, not be sweet to him when she woke. He looked at her ruefully. Then, taking his courage in both hands, he wakened her with a hearty

Opening her eyes, Grace looked up at him in a bewildered way; then she looked round the room.

"I would gladly have let you sleep on," Tom said; "but I did not dare, in those wet things."

"I'm quite rested now, and quite ready to start for home."

"For Heatherstone?"

"Of course. I have no home but Heatherstone."

"You must put that notion aside. For the future your husband's home will be your home."

"It will be soon enough to talk of that when I have a husband."

"Which will be long before this hour to-morrow."

"Don't waste time in talking nonsense. Of course we can have some kind of vehicle. Go and arrange for our starting at once. That you obey me in this is the only possible condition on which I can ever forgive you."

Grace, sitting very erect, looked at Tom with the ominous frown, of which he was in no slight dread, beginning to contract her brows.

"Do you think, Grace, I brought you here just to take you back again? Do you think that would have been a gentlemanly or a manly proceeding? Remember, I made, and I make, no pretense of having lost my way. Every thing was pre-arranged."

Tom's tone was stern and decided now. He did not look like a man to be trifled with. Grace had tried carrying things with a high hand, and felt she had failed.

"I insist on going home to-night!" stormed Grace.

"It is impossible! Your horse is dead lame, and mine will not carry a lady; there is no vehicle of any kind to be hired here. My own carriage will be here the first thing in the morning to take us on to Oldborough, where we shall be married by special license, and whence we shall start for anywhere you please."

"You villain! you maniac! you— Do you dream I will submit, sir? No, I will leave this house at once, if I leave it on foot—if I die upon the road!"

Grace was now "beside herself" with rage.

"You will do no such thing," Tom answered, coolly. "What you will do, Grace, is to go to the next room and change your things. You will find our good old nurse Hexter there, with clothes of yours which she got from your own maid. She will wait upon you. You can go to bed at once, leaving me in possession here; or you can come back to me when you have changed your dress, and let us have a good talk. That would be jollier, only I think that you should rest. One thing is certain, Grace, that five minutes longer you must not keep on those clothes."

"I will keep them on all night—I will sleep in them—they shall be the death of me!" was Grace's passionate cry.

"I have too good an opinion of your sense, Grace, to believe that you will do any thing."

foolish; and I would take them off myself before you should run any such risk."

Grace, having got up from her chair, and taken a few steps in the room, was glad to sit down again; she could hardly stand, much less walk.

"A mad, disgraceful business!" she still scolded. "And you think I will give in? You have forgotten that I have some spirit—some pride, some temper! You cruel, deceitful, cowardly Tom! What have I done that you should use me so—that you should set such a trap for me—that you should bring such disgrace upon me? Oh! Tom, how could you do it?"

"Come into the trap and see if it is such a bad place, after all, Gracie." And Tom opened his arms. But Grace's gesture of angry repugnance reminded him to hide the melting of his heart. Long experience had shown him that to put himself at Grace's feet was to have Grace trample upon him. If he was to carry the thing through successfully, he must do it sternly. There would be time for tenderness and apology afterward.

"No disgrace will be brought upon you unless by your own folly," he said. "This is not the way in which I should have preferred making you my wife; but I was weary of your tyrannies and waywardnesses—of your delays."

"You can not force me to marry you."

"That is quite true," Tom answered, pulling fiercely at his mustache, and looking at himself in the mirror. It cut him to the heart to say any thing cruel and ungenerous to Grace. "But, after such an escapade as this of ours," he went on, "it would be better that you should re-appear in society as Mrs. Blatchford. Tongues will wag, and, once set in motion, they seldom keep strictly to the truth."

That speech made the blood boil in Grace's brain, and throb visibly in her temples. It gave her strength, too; she sprang up as if she knew nothing of fatigue and faintness. She clenched her hands, and stamped her feet, and poured out on Tom a torrent of invective.

Many a man might have been frightened at the thought of having for a wife a woman whom passion could transform into such a fury. Not so Tom, who had known Grace from a baby.

"Hit me, Grace, if you think that will do you good," he said. "Let me put on your boots; you will hurt those bits of velvet if you stamp like that; and yet you make no noise!"

Grace dashed her hand against the marble mantel-piece and cut it, and looked as if she meant to dash her head there too.

But Tom took her hands and held them, and she could not stir.

"They are mine," he said. "I will not have the poor little, soft, pretty things bruised and hurt."

With one hand of his he held her hands, the other arm he put round her, and forced her back into the chair. Still holding her hands, he stood before her, looking so masterful that

Grace, possessed by a sudden sense of the futility of all resistance, burst into passionate tears of humiliation, indignation, confusion, amazement, subjection.

Tom then released the struggling hands, and she covered her convulsed face with them. She wept—now loud, now low, tempestuously, hysterically, bitterly, heart-brokenly. If Tom deserved punishment, he got it now.

His face showed that he was getting it. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the moisture off his forehead as he waited. When she had exhausted herself and was quiet, he said,

"I shall teach you to forgive me, Grace. As your husband, you'll find me more yielding than, as your lover, I'd ever promise to be. I'm not a fellow for promises, but just see if I am not good to my wife! Come, Grace, look up; give me a smile. Let us have done with tragedies."

But Grace moaned.

"I didn't think you could have used me so. My heart is broken. I'm disgraced forever. I can never hold up my head again."

"That is all nonsense, Grace. Your heart isn't broken, and you're not disgraced forever. And Mrs. Blatchford shall hold up her pretty head as high as she pleases."

"What can they possibly think of me at home?"

"The truth. I took all the blame upon myself. They know it's all my doing."

"There's something so ridiculous, so theatrical about it, Tom." Grace said this between laughing and crying, and altogether relenting.

Mr. Blatchford seated himself on the side of her chair, and took her into his arms.

"There," he commented, "she's got over her tantrums, and she's going to be a good, sensible, forgiving darling."

Grace did not resist or withdraw herself. She let herself be soothed and petted. Probably she even felt a sense of sweetness and of rest in yielding and ending all struggle. Presently she let Tom ring, and give her over to the charge of the old nurse. A fine old woman, between sixty and seventy, without a silver thread in her yellow hair, and of a very imposing appearance in the handsome gray silk gown Mr. Blatchford had given her to wear at his wedding.

"She's been very angry with me, nurse," Tom said, "and very hard upon me; but she's forgiven me now, at last."

Left alone, Tom, after picking out the best of every thing to be sent to Grace, took his delayed supper with hearty appetite, and in gloriously good spirits.

Then, when the table had been cleared, and when he had heard from Mrs. Hexter that Grace was in bed, and in a soft, warm sleep, he stretched himself upon a sofa before the fire, and slept till morning—his wedding-morning. He had meant to keep vigil, to meditate. But he had gone through a good deal, and slept instead.

He woke with the first stir in the house, caused by the arrival of his own carriage and his portmanteaus. He made a most careful toilet, and then, returning to the parlor, nervously awaited Grace. She breakfasted in her own room, and only left it to get into the carriage.

The marriage took place without let or hindrance. After pauses in London and Paris, to attend to the neglected necessities of Grace's wardrobe, they proceeded to Rome. Olivia and Alice went to see Grace in London. Grace would have preferred postponing the meeting, but Miss Dacre insisted upon seeing her before she went abroad. In Rome Tom would have

been intolerably bored, had it not been for the slight distraction of hunting in the Campagna; for Grace rather maliciously insisted upon conscientiously culturing her taste by studying "every thing." It is not certain that Grace enjoyed, with all the zest she would have expected, this process of "culture." Her brightest and sunniest memories of Rome were of rides with Tom across the Campagna, and saunters with Tom in the Borghese and the Pamfili gardens—where the spring foliage and the spring grass seemed so refreshingly English—while they discussed where and what like their home should be.

BOOK VI.—MRS. WINTER.

CHAPTER I.

HOW IT WAS WITH JULIAN.

"For Love himself took part against himself."

DIRECTLY after the burial of his Marian poor old General Burmander rushed away from Fiordimare, where she had suffered so terribly—where she had died—where every thing spoke to him of her.

He left Julian to make all after arrangements. Julian was himself to choose marble for her monument; he was to design the monument himself, and himself to superintend its execution. It had been her own wish to be buried in the little inclosed thicket of fragrant shrubs close to the sea, and in shadow of the great "good" Pines, which is the English burial-ground at Fiordimare.

"She always liked your taste better than mine, boy," the poor old fellow sobbed out; "she tried not to show it, but I always knew it."

General Burmander's was not a dignified grief. He wished to die, or to forget; nothing between seemed possible. To rush away from the place where every thing reminded him of her—from Julian, whose pale face spoke to him of her—was his first impulse. He was ready to catch childishly at every outward distraction—to run about the world, trying to leave grief and misery behind him. Even in the very first days of his sorrow he was able at times, for five or ten minutes, to set it aside; but then those five or ten minutes would be followed by a terrible outburst, as of accumulated anguish. He was like a child who will suspend its passionate screams of grief or anger while some sudden sight or sound calls off its attention, and then begin again with increased violence.

So Julian, having lost her between whom and him had been love almost as that between mother and son, was left alone at the villa at Fiordimare; feeling, too, pretty much alone in all the world.

When that monument, of which he made a labor of love, was finished—when he had attended to all his dead friend's last wishes—looking over all her papers, burning some, arranging others, as she had instructed him—Julian was free, as he felt, to go or stay here or there, anywhere, within the limits of his promise to Colonel Dacre.

The lease on which the villa had been taken would not expire for a good while; as well, therefore, he felt, remain there as go any other

where. Perhaps, if he dared touch it, he could finish his book here. And he would be glad to study the people and the dialects of the districts close around.

Did he dare touch his book?

He believed himself enough of an "artist" to be able to so far set aside that, when he once got fairly to work, they should not distract him, dangerous associations connected with that often-interrupted and much-delayed book.

The first thing Julian found it needful or, at all events, expedient to do, was to copy, so that he might put away, all Alice's pretty manuscript. For out from between its leaves would occasionally fall a flower, or the petal of a flower; and he would remember how that flower had been worn by Alice, or held by Alice, or gathered by Alice, on this or that special day or hour, and had, for this or that reason, been preserved as sacred by him; and memories, more dangerous than these faded flowers, would fly out upon him from between the fair writing of those pages.

He could not, therefore, "work" on lines written by Alice, paper on which her hand had rested, over which her breath had wandered, communicating to it, as it seemed to him, her own sweetness. When he found himself, as it appeared to him without consent of his own will, dreaming such dreams of Alice as he had no right to dream, holding to his lips or to his cheek what she had consecrated, he resolved to lose no time in copying this treacherously precious manuscript, and then in consigning it to the flames. He would make a fire in the villa garden, a fire of myrtle and of lavender, of cassia and orange-flowers, of bright-burning, dry vine-branches, and of spicy-scented fir-cones, and then it should be burned there with all due solemnity.

Was Julian, as yet, a tender and fantastical, rather than a passionate lover? Julian was not fortunately circumstanced for conquering his love, especially love of an ideal and dreamy nature, such as was now his for Alice. He needed companionship of a bracing kind, and a more bracing atmosphere. And he was alone in the romantic, languorous, richly-perfumed climate of Fiordimare. He was not in strong health either. He had devoted himself with self-forgetting thoroughness to Mrs. Burmander, and the last few weeks of her life had been so harrowingly painful, from the intensity of her physical suffering, and so soul-piercingly pathetic, from the perfect resignation and loving trust with which these suffer-

ings had been borne, that the strongest nerves and toughest sensibilities might have been taxed.

And now, as he worked earnestly at that copying, he seemed to live back in those dangerously dear and happy months at Heatherstone, to be again in the beautiful old library, to scent the summer scent of sun-warmed roses and lime-blossoms. Looking up, he would expect to see the deep purple of the wooded gorge, on the opposite slopes some harvest-fields, above all the rim of the moor, and—between him and all other beauty—what had so slowly and so subtly grown to mean, for him, the quintessence of all beauty—the fair head of Alice! Its pale golden cloud of hair, moving at the slightest breath, of even a page turned quickly; the delicately noble and spiritually shining face intent attention, as she bent it over her writing, or interested patience, as it was lifted, waiting for what was to come next; lightly-parted lips of softest rose, letting a little pearly gleam through, if she asked a question, and eyes—

Then Julian would remember how it was the rare intelligence which seemed to him to shine out of those eyes that had first drawn his notice upon Alice, whom he had before been inclined to pass over slightly, as too merely girlish a creature to engage his mature and serious interest. Recalling those eyes now, their deep, soft, grave gaze would seem to penetrate to his heart of hearts, and awaken slumbering honor, to rouse him to the consciousness that of Alice, who was soon to be, who even now might be, his friend's wife, he had no right to sit and dream fantastically romantic fancies.

He would rise, push open the jalousies, and look out, to remind himself of what was the real world about him; look out on what seemed to him a dry and weary glitter of white and gold and blue, as he looked past fruit and blossom-covered orange and lemon trees, to the blinding flash of the Mediterranean under intense sunlight; and a parched longing for the gray and the green, the cloud and the dew, the brooks and the birds of England, would possess him. But with such longing, Julian knew, thoughts of Alice were too intimately associated for him to dare yield to its prompting.

"When she is his wife I will dare see her—not before! Then I shall see in her his wife—only his wife. My friend's wife, in whom I shall learn in time to find another friend."

Yet, even while he said this to himself, he could not reconcile himself to the notion of Alice as Colonel Dacre's wife. He had no feeling of this as a thing that was to be.

By-and-by, when that copying was ended—when the fragrant bonfire had consumed the precious pages, and Julian, watching the holocaust, had felt, as if he were assisting at the sacrifice of all that could make life desirable, things

began to improve with him. As he worked on he began to be conscious that close to him, where he would soon reach to it, was that something indefinable, unattainable by any effort for those to whom it does not come without conscious effort, that "joy in doing" which is the crown of life—it may be, at times, a crown of thorns, yet always a crown, for the true "artist"—joy in doing which is, perhaps, more than any thing else akin to joy in loving. (Joy in loving of course including that love of God which should be the greatest joy of love, and which is surely what "religion" should chiefly be.) Both these, joy in loving and joy in doing, by lifting us out of and above ourselves, take from us more than can any thing else that "burden of being," consciousness of the weight of existence, which is often the "misery" of those who have no right to be miserable. So are Art and Love the good things of life.

The true artist or the true lover is true artist or true lover in proportion as he can live out of or beyond himself in Art or Love. Possibly, judging by this rule, there would be found far fewer true lovers, even if no more true artists, than the world supposes; but, possibly, a few more true artists. Not meaning, necessarily, only those true artists who, being great men and women, do great work to enrich the world, but also lesser men and women, who, true-hearted and single-minded, raise themselves to the level of artists instead of remaining laborers (for is not the difference between art and labor more one of "how" than "what?") by the completeness of devotion with which they surrender themselves to their work.

"Thank God for work! Thank God that I can love my work, and live in it!" So said Julian, right fervently and right reverently, one afternoon, as he put his work away with a sense of longing impatience for the morrow which should, as he hoped, find him refreshed and ready to resume work. A morrow that was indeed for him far off!

When he had finished his frugal dinner, and had written a few letters, which he put in his pocket-book, and meant should go by to-morrow's early post, he went out for an evening walk—little dreaming, poor young fellow (and yet he was hardly to be pitied), that he was going toward an adventure that would make that beloved work impossible for days and weeks and months. (Very light, though, even that knowledge would have been, had he known also under what circumstances the interrupted work would be one day at last resumed.)

Julian—"poor Julian"—was one of the so-called "unlucky" ones, who are always encountering accidents and adventures; sometimes from ill-chosen seasons of preoccupation, sometimes from quick-sighted courage and splendid rashness shown in behalf of other people.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JULIAN.

"Something like
That face, methinks, I should have somewhere seen;
But floods of woe have hurried it far off
Beyond my ken of soul."

HALF-WAY between Fiordimare and Boccaridente, and about a quarter of a mile from the walls which inclose the gardens of the princely villa known as the Villa Castelluccio, two ladies returning toward the villa from an evening walk in the direction of Boccaridente, were greatly alarmed (or rather the elder of the two was greatly alarmed—the younger was not of a nature to shrink from any thing which promised adventure) by the gesticulation of, as they supposed, a maniac coming along the road toward them.

The supposed maniac was Julian, and presently, saying something they did not understand, he rushed up and seized hold of them. He half dragged, half pushed them, as he could, some paces backward. Then came a great dust or smoke—they couldn't tell which—and a deafening sound of thunder.

When the dust cleared off, Julian, whose last effort had been one great further push, was lying on the ground near them.

Julian had detected a movement on the recently-quarried hill-side, toward which his eyes had been drawn by some lovely effect of the sunset-light—a movement which he thought preceded, as it was proved it did, a land-slip. A considerable mass of rock fell; but the main bulk of it bounded from point to point, missed the road, and thundered down into the sea. The road, nevertheless, was strewn with various-sized fragments, and one of these had struck and had felled Julian.

It had all happened in such a flash that the ladies needed to pause to draw breath before they recognized what really had happened, their own marvelous escape and Julian's overthrow.

Then the younger of the two—a girl whom Julian had noticed when he had once or twice met her, because of her fair-haired beauty, which reminded him, at first sight, of Alice, and who had returned his notice with bolder eyes and franker scrutiny than at all accorded with his idea of maidenly modesty in a fair-haired girl who presumed to have even that superficial likeness to Alice—this girl now, after stooping down to examine Julian, whom she declared to be dead, told her older companion—somewhat to that lady's consternation—who Julian was, where he lived, how long he had been at Fiordimare, and other particulars about him more or less true.

Not, of course, stopping now to ask how the girl had become possessed of all this information—though even now making a mental note of it as a thing needing to be inquired into—Mrs. Winter (that was the name by which the elder lady was known) dispatched her pupil to

the villa to summon assistance for carrying Julian there, where he must remain, at least till a surgeon had seen him, and examined into the nature and extent of his injuries—for there was no other house within a mile.

Then, kneeling on the road beside him, she cautiously lifted his head from the dust on to her knee, and tried to discover where he was injured.

"Not dead! surely he is not dead!" she cried, in a shocked voice, seeing how young and how beautiful was the face which looked like a dead face.

Blood was oozing from a wound on his temple; but it was not a wound that could, she thought, when she had wiped it with her handkerchief and looked at it, be of importance.

And in this she was right; it was not this that was Julian's serious hurt; and yet the face on her knee looked like a dead face. Bending her cheek to his mouth, she could feel no faintest respiration, but, putting her hand over his heart, she thought she detected a feeble fluttering.

"Thank God!" she said. "Poor boy! There would be grief indeed for your mother if you had died. It is just a face for a mother's loving worship," she added, as she bent her own close over it.

Julian looked always younger than even his young years. He wore no beard or whisker, and his slight mustache was of silky softness. His present death-like pallor brought out the delicately fine chiseling of his features, and added darkness to his dark brows and lashes.

The lady who gazed down on him thought she had never seen a more perfectly beautiful face, only it was too like the beauty of death. Her gaze of compassionate admiration by-and-by grew intent and perplexed, as that of one trying to remember.

"I have it now!" she thought. "It is like the face of that dead Christ in Giotto's picture in the Uffizi Gallery—a younger and a darker face, they said, than any other painter has painted as our Lord's—a face that strangely impressed itself upon me as like—"

At this moment Julian opened his eyes. They were full of pain and of confused trouble; they gazed up perplexedly into the very beautiful eyes that so compassionately gazed down upon him. The likeness to the pictured face of the dead Christ disappeared with the opening of the eyes, and gave place to another likeness—to a far more complete likeness than any she had found in the picture to the face of which the picture had reminded her.

In that soft evening light, and under the softening influence of emotion and of pity, not only that lady's eyes were beautiful, but her whole countenance was beautiful, with a noble and sorrow-chastened kind of beauty. She was not young.

A mutual fascination seemed to hold Julian's eyes fixed upon the lady's, the lady's on Julian's, till Julian tried to move, to lift himself.

on his elbow, in order to look round. When he found he could not, even wondering pained him.

"Was any one hurt? was Alice?" he moaned out.

He spoke too faintly for Mrs. Winter to be able to catch his words, though she bent lower, trying to hear them. One of Julian's last conscious thoughts, before he was struck down, had been to save the fair hair, which was like Alice's, from being dabbled with blood; and now the idea of Alice, as associated with the accident, was stamped upon his jarred and bewildered brain.

Julian's eyes sought about restlessly. What he saw was a young moon setting behind some olives, silvering their soft grayness with its last light; a group of umbrella-pines, showing their quaint contours against a melon-colored sky, while a delicate veil of violet-hued haze rested on the sea. Not an English scene. The air was soft and balmy, but it was not English air. It was full of rich spring odors, but too rich and too spicy for those of an English spring—of the almond-scented, white-flowering heath with which the hill-side was covered, and, from farther off, the perfumes from the fields of flowers, fields of violet, of jasmine, and of rose, and from the large orange and lemon orchards belonging to the villa.

Julian sighed heavily, oppressed by what seemed like the weight of the waves of deadly sickness which kept flowing over him. He said, just audibly,

"I suppose it is all a dream."

She caught these words, and answered them.

"Alas! no, my poor boy, it is no dream—you are hurt."

"And Alice?"

"It is only you who are hurt; there is no Alice here. Do you know where you are most hurt? Can you tell me if you are in much pain? Never mind—don't disturb yourself; we will have it all seen to soon."

Her voice sounded to herself other than her own for very sweetness—the cooing, soothing sweetness of a mother's to a sick child. It had a strange effect on Julian; it seemed to him penetratingly sweet, and, in its sweetness, bewilderingly familiar; it seemed to creep to the marrow of his bones and to the innermost recesses of his heart, as no other voice in all his life had ever done. He did not think of answering it. Waiting for the voice to speak again, he swooned again—a long, long swoon this time, which spared him consciousness of pain when he was, by-and-by, lifted and moved.

"He is dead!" the servants from the villa pronounced.

"No, no, he is not dead," the lady answered them sharply.

CHAPTER III.

STORGÉ.

"Of what he dimly understands,
'It can not be,' the fool will say;
Know thou to-morrow in his hands
Will hold a lamp to light to-day."

JULIAN was carried into the great drawing-room of the villa, and the surgeon who superintended his removal, while he was still insensible, from the sofa on which he had first been laid to a hastily-prepared bed, prophesied that it would be many days before he could even leave that bed. But for a case not of a nature, as he said, to postpone itself, which called him to the mountains, he would have remained all night. This being impossible, having done the little that could now be done, and instructed Mrs. Winter what further could be done in certain emergencies, he took his leave, promising to come again at the first possible minute. There might be injury to the spine, concussion of the brain—one or both, he said; on his next visit he would be better able to determine. The kind of night passed by the patient would help him to a guess as to the extent of the mischief. Madame, he hoped, would herself be able to keep watch this one night; to-morrow he would send in a "sister." He had dispatched a mounted messenger to Genoa for ice, which was to be used freely, if any thing approaching to delirium showed itself.

When Dr. Valery was gone, and her pupil, after some difficulty, got rid of for the night, and Mrs. Winter took up her position by her patient's bed, she had time to recognize the awkward dilemma in which she had placed herself. Had she, moved by his beautiful face, yielded too unreflectingly to her impulsive compassion for the young stranger, and forgotten her duty as governess and duenna?

Mrs. Winter's pupil, Miss Flora Kennedy, only child and heiress of Sir Everard Hope Kennedy, was a very intractable young person. Her mother had been a woman of great beauty, whom Sir Everard, when very young, had married for that beauty. She was of low birth, and, a few years after her marriage, which had taken place when she was only seventeen, had begun to prove herself of lower conduct. To run away with one of her husband's grooms had been the final step of her career. Happily for her husband, sparing him world-wide exposure, and letting it be possible to hush up the affair, it was in a full sense final. She was thrown from her horse, and killed almost immediately—that is to say, on her flight, within a few hours of the time she left her house. To her husband she was self-convicted by a letter she had left behind; to some of the servants, by arrangements she had made. Still, there had been no complete *esclandre*.

Sir Everard quitted the country on foreign diplomatic service, leaving Flora, then five years old, with his mother. But that high-minded old lady did not more than a year or two sur-

vive the wreck of her son's life. Flora was transferred to the guardianship of an aunt, who, finding the responsibility too great, begged her father to choose a governess for her. Sir Everard, who had then lately become acquainted with Mrs. Winter, and had formed a very high estimate of her character, laid all the circumstances of his life, and all his fears lest he should see the mother over again in the daughter before her, and asked if she would take entire charge of the girl. Mrs. Winter had now for nearly ten years had this entire charge of Miss Kennedy. She frankly told Sir Everard she feared she had no influence for good over her pupil. To which he had made the bitter answer that, the mother's blood being in the girl's veins, the fact that she had been kept till now from active evil laid him under an inexpressible obligation.

Flora needed as much a warder as a governess. She did not seem to have any affectionateness in her disposition, nor any sense of honor or modesty, while her craving for the attention and admiration of men was a sort of mania—a delirium.

"What have I done?" cried poor Mrs. Winter, as she looked on Julian's face, which she judged so beautiful, and thought how probably Lady Flora's fair locks and fair flesh and tint of strawberries and cream would snare so young a man's fancy.

Already she had had a specimen of the sort of difficulty she would have to encounter. The good old Dr. Valery had been obliged to put the girl out of the room almost by force before he examined his patient; so perseveringly had she pressed upon him her services and assistance. Under the plea of "gratitude to her deliverer," Mrs. Winter foresaw how Flora would surpass herself in a style of conduct with which she found it all the more difficult to deal, as it was impossible to know how far it was to be laid to shameless impudence, how far to stupid ignorance.

"What have I done?" again and again cried poor Mrs. Winter. But she tried to console herself by the consciousness that she could not have done less or differently, and that Sir Everard—whose only slavery was to the maxim "*noblesse oblige*," his one violation of which, in marrying unworthily, he had repented all his life since—would be the first to justify her. Besides, at the worst, if her stranger-guest should not be able to be moved for a long time, and if Flora was not to be kept within bounds, she could, immediately on the arrival of his friends, leave them and the sufferer in possession of the villa, and take Miss Kennedy elsewhere.

"His friends!" Who, she wondered, were his nearest friends? Had he a mother? If so, she certainly would want to be beside such a son at such a time.

It was only during the first two or three hours of her watch by Julian that Mrs. Winter had leisure for meditation. After that her

patient's growing restlessness and fever, which, toward morning, increased to violently delirious excitement, occupied her, mind and body. One horror seemed always before his eyes. That mass of rock was always falling, or about to fall, on Alice. The name of Alice, pronounced in all variety of tones—of terror, of despair, of tenderness—was always on his lips.

"Alice is not here. Alice was not hurt. No one was hurt but you, poor boy! You saved every one else and got hurt yourself." So she kept assuring him. Sometimes he seemed to understand, and was, for a few moments, quiet; sometimes the sense of her words did not seem to penetrate to him; and yet the sound of her voice soothed him. Presently, saying, "Try to rest, try to sleep. Alice is safe. Only you are hurt. Try to rest, try to sleep," she laid her soft, cool hand upon his burning forehead. The ice for which she was longing had not even now come. Again, even to herself, her voice had sounded unfamiliar for very sweetness. Was it that she tried to speak to him as she, who herself had known what it was to be a mother, felt his mother must have spoken had she been beside him then?

While her hand lay on his forehead Julian fell asleep. He slept at least an hour; and, while she watched his sleep for that hour, her eyes never taken from his face, a strange yearning wistfulness of passion grew upon Mrs. Winter. Once, moved to do it by irresistible impulse, she softly stooped over him, lower and lower, nearer and nearer, till her lips touched his smooth white lids. "For your mother," she said to herself; and she added, "And for my son." Then she fell into profound realization of the joy and the sweetness of being mother to such a son. That mother's kiss set upon those white lids woke the mother's hunger in her heart—a dear, delicious, for her dangerous, hunger.

"And my boy, if he lives, may be such another," she thought, "as beautiful as this boy. The little dark head which lay in my bosom may by this time be such a head as this! Ah! Heaven, shall I ever meet him and know him? Could I meet him and not know him? Could I know him and not claim him? Not claim him for my own, my very own?"

Her thoughts grew passionately agitating. Was it possible that her mental disturbance communicated itself to Julian? After much moaning and restless movement Julian sprang up with a shout of horror.

After this his delirium grew more and more violent, and she failed in any effort to soothe him. The ice had by this time come, and she used it diligently, but apparently without any good result.

With the earliest daylight Miss Kennedy, coquettishly arrayed, came into the room, urging Mrs. Winter to take some rest and leave the patient to her.

The girl's fair hair, catching the first sun-

light, caught also Julian's attention. He spoke to her confused, incoherent words, of which she caught only the one word "Alice."

He mistook her, then, for Alice! Alice was, of course, the girl with whom he was "in love!" Flora thought this very interesting; she thought, too, it would be amusing pastime to make this handsome young Mr. Farquhar jilt "Alice," falling "madly in love" with herself.

Miss Kennedy was destitute of imagination, but was just able to fancy-sketch such a little programme as this.

If her hair were something like Alice's, and her fairness, there the likeness ended. Instead of Alice's large, sweet, serious orbs, Flora had "pig's eyes;" instead of Alice's especially spiritual expression, Flora's was of the flesh, fleshly.

The girl's presence in the room increased Julian's disorder; but it was not at once, nor without difficulty, that Mrs. Winter could make her go away, and send, in her place, their good old faithful Swiss maid, Rosalie.

Dr. Valery was indeed welcome when, at last, he came, bringing with him a Sister of Charity, whom he strongly recommended to act as nurse.

Mrs. Winter now conscientiously tried to abandon the sick boy to the care of Sister Martha and of Rosalie, and to devote herself scrupulously to the usual routine of her duties with her pupil. It was hard to her, beyond any thing she could have believed, to do this; she was keenly alive to every sound from the sick-room, and intensely conscious of Julian's acute suffering; the effort to keep away from him made her heart sick.

How grateful she was when, just at this time, relatives of Sir Everard's came to Fiordimare, and took Flora a good deal off her hands! As one of the party was Sir Everard's sister, she could trust Flora to them, and know that on them would fall the responsibility if any thing should go wrong with the girl while she was in their keeping.

Mrs. Winter, after all, was really Julian's chief nurse. She took a share of the night-watching in turn with Rosalie, in order to leave Sister Martha fit for the arduous duties of the day; and she took always by far the larger share. There was steadily and rapidly growing in her a feeling for her patient that made it difficult for her to overcome jealous reluctance that any one else should do any thing for him.

On the first day of Julian's sojourn at the villa Mrs. Winter had written to Sir Everard, just then in London, a full account of the accident, and of what she had done and arranged, asking him further instructions. His answer had been little more than an expression of his absolute confidence in her wisdom and her prudence. He left her *carte-blanc* in every way. He spoke of himself as overworked, over-~~night~~ *harassed by incessant and incompatible* *time upon him.* His short letter had two

hasty postscripts. The first merely said that he trusted to her not, in her conscientious scruples and anxieties about her charge, in any way to forget or to slight the obligations they were under to this young stranger. In the second, he said he had just heard what made it probable he should be in Marseilles within the next few weeks, *en route* for the East. If so, he would be particularly glad if she would meet him there with his daughter.

CHAPTER IV.

JULIAN WRITES TO HEATHERSTONE.

"This passion grows to be not mine, but me!
What means it, and whence comes it? How shall it
Be mastered?"

FOR more than a week Julian had lain in a condition in which it had been useless to ask him a question. Mrs. Winter had wondered if it were her duty to examine any letters or papers that might be in his pockets, with a view of ascertaining to whom she ought to write a report of what had happened; but from day to day she had postponed settling this question with herself. From day to day care for him, anxiety about him, service of him, more and more completely engrossed her, and she grew to feel as if she herself had a right to him, greater than any one else could have; grew to feel this, however, without any inward recognition that she had any such feeling. She had learned from Flora that young Mr. Farquhar had lived at Fiordimare with General and Mrs. Burmander, whom she knew by name. She might suppose, therefore, that they were his nearest relatives or dearest friends; and she knew that Mrs. Burmander was dead, and that the general was traveling. So day followed day, and no steps were taken toward bringing Julian's friends to him. Dr. Valery had always said that his life was in no danger. But by-and-by came a morning when, as letters were brought to Mrs. Winter while she sat in Julian's room, having sent Sister Martha to get her breakfast and a mouthful of fresh air, he woke, and his attention fixed itself upon them. The sound of his feeble voice called her immediately to his side. A few moments before she had been watching his death-like sleep, and then had moved to the window.

"Letters!" he said; "the sight of them reminds me that I should write, if only two lines, to my friends in England. They must wonder. Is it long that I have lain here?"

His voice was so weak that she had to stoop close over him to catch what he said; but he looked calm and collected. She knew that he was better, that the looked-for favorable turn had come; his eyes had power and concentration in them for the first time since many days.

"You are much better," she said, in a tone of soft, suppressed joy, gently pushing back the

damp, dark hair from his forehead, with a tenderly, motherly gesture, as she spoke.

Even at that moment she was conscious that, after the first instinctive movement of joy, followed a heart-sinking and sickness; premonition, perhaps, of the emptiness and desolation that must reign in her when—the “better” changed to “well”—he should be gone.

“Yes,” answered Julian; “thanks to you, I am much better. I have known of your goodness, of your loving-kindness, when every thing else seemed the most horrible hot muddle and darkness and anguish.”

Her beautiful eyes softened with moisture—a lovely flush that took years from her age suffused her face; but she only said, in that tone of ineffable sweetness that was for him only,

“You must not speak. You are very, very weak as yet, poor boy.”

“But may I try to write—three lines?”

“First let me give you some breakfast. Then let me write for you.”

The breakfast, which was of strong soup and wine, was no sooner taken than Julian fell asleep again. That day and the next he said no more of writing. He was too weak to think or to remember; he slept the chief part of his time. Then, her conscience reproaching her, she, at a time of day when he was at his strongest, asked if he would tell her to whom he would wish her to write for him.

But Julian begged to be allowed to try to write with his own hand. She set him up with pillows, and brought him pen and ink and paper.

“Is it to your mother you are going to write?” she asked, faintly.

Julian only answered by a shake of the head. He had no energy to spare for explanations.

She could not help seeing what he wrote, for she had to try to steady his hand. But as he began, “Best beloved friend,” the name of the person to whom he wrote was not betrayed to her.

“Let me address it for you?” she pleaded, as Julian fell back exhausted. “To whom?”

And she held her pen suspended, ready to write. But Julian had fainted; the effort had been too much.

Every thing then was, of course, set aside. But afterward, feeling that Julian’s own lines made too light of his condition, Mrs. Winter herself wrote, and slipped into the same envelope what she thought a fair account of his state. In the evening Julian asked if his letter had been posted. She reminded him that it had not even been addressed, and again offered to address it.

“If I could do it myself they would be so much less alarmed,” he said. “Let me try to-morrow.”

When “to-morrow” came Julian was stronger. He addressed his letter, and also made Sister Martha search his note-book for the delayed letter—the one he had written before his accident, and only now remembered. This he inclosed with his yesterday’s feeble scrawl.

It chanced that this day Mrs. Winter was on duty with Flora, and all day hardly saw Julian. And Julian’s letter was posted while she was out; and she knew no more than before to whom Julian wrote “as best beloved friend.”

That night, when Mrs. Winter, in the middle of the night, brought him his medicine, Julian, not quite awake, looked up at her and said,

“Who are you?”

“Mrs. Winter, your nurse,” she answered him softly, flushing as she spoke. The question seemed to move as well as to surprise her.

“That isn’t what I mean,” he said. “But no matter, I suppose I’ve been dreaming about you; I suppose it was in my dream that I’ve always been going to find out something about you—something about having known you before—and yet not in this life. Oh! I’ve been dreaming, and the dream has left a strange, confused feeling—that is all.”

He drank what she offered him, and fell asleep again. But no inclination to sleep weighed on his nurse’s lids that night or morning.

A few days later Julian began to be very cautiously moved on to a sofa, and the sofa wheeled into another room every afternoon, to escape the afternoon sun. Miss Kennedy immediately, when she was at home, showed a wonderful fancy for sitting in the garden, and at just that part of it on to which looked the window in which Julian lay.

At first it seemed to Mrs. Winter that a love-affair between these young people must be inevitable, unless she took some decided step; and the decided step of herself going away with Flora, which a week or two since had seemed so easy, seemed now not difficult, but impossible. In fact, this poor lady’s every thought, night and day, every hope, every care, every prayer, had come to be centred on this sick young stranger. He had saved her life, certainly; but she had never known till now that life was so precious to her that she should feel like this to any stranger who should save it. Either she could not or she dare not understand herself.

No mother, ambitious for her son, could have felt more passionate pain at the prospect of that son’s marrying unworthily than Mrs. Winter felt about the danger to Julian from Flora’s golden locks. To Mrs. Winter just now, her position was one of infinite difficulty. Her feelings with regard to her guest were obtaining more and more complete mastery over her, and she needed to keep strictest watch and ward over herself, as well as over her pupil, lest she should betray herself to Flora’s misapprehension and ridicule.

This she had already done, in a manner, to an extent of which she had no suspicion. If Flora were stupid about things high and noble, she nevertheless had a good deal of keen craftiness and low cunning. Poor Mrs. Winter’s cheeks must have grown hot, and her heart burned within her, had she overheard what Flora one evening said to Julian.

She had evaded Mrs. Winter, and had entered Julian's room from the garden, bringing with her a basket of oranges she had just gathered, and which, sitting while she did so where Julian could see her, she had prettily decorated with orange-leaves and blossoms.

"I would come and see you much oftener if I could, Mr. Farquhar," Miss Kennedy volunteered, when her present had of course been courteously received. "I am sure you must be horribly dull here. And I'd read to you, and talk to you, and amuse you, and we'd have great fun, but for that ridiculous old governess of mine, who is in love with you herself, and so frightfully jealous that I can hardly ever escape from her. Whenever I propose to come and see you she forbids it, and says I shall do you harm. Isn't she an absurd old thing?"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Julian, half in reproof, half in real bewilderment.

"Of Mrs. Winter, of course. When I do any thing she doesn't like, she always threatens to complain of me to papa; and papa is a person, and the only person, of whom I am afraid. Are you inclined to marry your grandmother, Mr. Farquhar? She is almost old enough to be that. She is quite ready to have you if you will have her. She takes the greatest care to keep you to herself. And one day—she didn't know I was looking—I saw her kiss you when you were asleep!"

Julian, being weak, blushed—for himself, for Mrs. Winter, or for Miss Kennedy?

"This basket of oranges is very pretty, Miss Kennedy," he said—"quite a little work of art in its way. I admire it exceedingly. But I can not admire—excuse me if I speak too frankly—your manner of speaking of a very estimable and beautiful lady."

"Beautiful! you call her beautiful! What do you call me, then?"

"Very pretty," he said, smiling at the frankness of the girl's vanity. "You made a charming picture under the orange-trees just now."

"You call Mrs. Winter beautiful just to tease me, I know," pouted Flora. "You can't really admire her. Why, she's as dark as you are, and certainly old enough to be your mother. Papa admires her, and I used to be afraid he meant to make her my stepmother; but then papa's not young as you are, and papa is fair. I like men to be dark, but I think all women should be light—should have white skins and fair hair; don't you think so?"

"No, I think that would be wearisomely monotonous. And I know ladies of dark complexion whom I think beautiful—as I have told you I think Mrs. Winter."

"But your Alice is fair—as fair as I am, perhaps?"

Again the rich blood rushed hotly over Julian's pale face.

"Of what, of whom are you speaking, Miss Kennedy?" he asked, very haughtily.

"Of your lady-love, your Alice. Ah! you I know all your secrets."

The girl laughed so loudly that Sister Martha came in.

"Mademoiselle is too noisy for a sick-room," she said; "and here is madame, who seeks you to go out."

"Just what I said, the jealous old cat!" Flora remarked, confidentially; then louder, "Good-bye, Mr. Farquhar. I shall come again soon, and then you shall tell me all about Alice." So saying, the girl ran away to change her dress.

Miss Kennedy had made Julian feverish, with a mixture of irritation and a deeper sort of annoyance.

"Dear Mrs. Winter, how I pity you!" he said; "what a dreadful young person! Are you obliged to put up with her? She is just the sort of girl who ought to be shut up in a convent to keep her safe."

"We shall soon leave you in peace now," answered Mrs. Winter, and her voice and her eyes were intensely sad.

"Do you think I wouldn't put up with her for your sake?"

Julian spoke energetically, and he took and kissed Mrs. Winter's hand, and sent a thrill of happiness to her heart.

"How your mother must love you!" she said, with soft fervor; speaking the thought, feeling, or question which had been always, from the first, in her heart.

"I have no mother," was Julian's answer; and then, when she felt she could have given—what? not the world, for Julian was in it—any thing precious to her that was not Julian, had she had any thing, for answer to just one or two questions, she was called away.

CHAPTER V.

AS BETWEEN MOTHER AND SON.

"Thou bear'st thy father's face;
Frank Nature, rather curious than in haste,
Hath well composed thee."

WHEN Dr. Valery came next day he wished that his patient should try to stand and walk. He did not know, he said, how otherwise to judge of the extent of the injuries he had sustained. To Mrs. Winter, who knew what the good doctor feared, the moment when Julian's feet were set on the ground, and when, leaning one hand heavily on her arm, the other on Sister Martha's, he tried to walk, was such a moment of deadly anxiety as his mother must have felt had she been there.

"I am feeling for his mother, for his dead mother," she said.

"Thank God!" she cried, pressing his hand to her throbbing heart, when Julian had managed a few steps, which brought him face to face with a mirror, into which he looked with an invalid's pathetic sort of interest and curiosity about himself, and the changes in himself, since he last looked at his own image.

"How my mustache has grown!" he remarked, with languid, pleased surprise. "And how funnily my hair is brushed!"

He smiled at himself as he said this, and Mrs. Winter's caressing, maternal smile answered his smile, as their eyes met in the mirror. At that moment Dr. Valery, who had been intently watching, ejaculated,

"What a likeness! as between mother and son. So, at least, one might say, but for the too great youth of madame," the kindly, clever old man supplanted gallantly.

The eyes which met each other in the mirror dilated with a startled expression, and this similarity of expression increased whatever other likeness there might be.

"I let you stand too long," Mrs. Winter said, in a barely audible voice, as Julian's thin face flushed, and then faded to more than its former waxen sort of pallor.

"He stands too long," was echoed by the good doctor. "Quick! to the couch, or he faints! There! I am well content. For the first trial all has gone bravely. I banish my worst fears."

When Mrs. Winter had re-arranged Julian's pillows, and the nurse had given him a restorative draught, keeping behind Julian's couch, where he could not see her, and speaking in a voice that did not seem like her voice, Mrs. Winter said,

"My too great youth is in the good doctor's imagination. My son, were he alive, would now be some years older than our patient. I married young. My son, were he now alive, would be five-and-twenty; our patient, I should say, is barely twenty."

"I am more than that. I am, as far as I know, just about the age you say your son would be."

Julian felt as if he spoke in a dream, as if every thing was floating away from him. Mrs. Winter, who had been standing, suddenly sat down. Her face, turned toward the window, was averted from them all. For some seconds there was complete silence in the room. The doctor was feeling his patient's pulse.

"A little agitated. He must have complete quiet," was his verdict. Then, approaching Mrs. Winter to take his leave, Dr. Valery was startled at the curious change, transfiguration, as it seemed, that had come over her face. He would have said something, but that, by a gesture, she seemed to implore his silence. He departed wondering.

Mrs. Winter had not moved when the nurse came to her side and whispered that Julian had fallen asleep, and that she would go into the garden for a quarter of an hour's fresh air, if madame were free to remain. Miss Kennedy was with her friends till the next day. Madame was free to remain. Sister Martha went. Then, after looking round, as if to assure herself either that she was alone, or that she was in the real live world, not in a dream, Mrs. Winter moved to where she could look upon the

sleeping boy. Her boy! as she called him to herself. She had no consciousness of time. She sat motionless, and never took her eyes from his face. Motionless, except once, when she stretched her arms toward him, and her lips formed some words. The words were not spoken. The arms were drawn back, and folded across her breast. When, by-and-by, Sister Martha returned to the room, Mrs. Winter left it. Julian still slept.

Mrs. Winter locked herself into her own chamber, and threw herself upon her knees by the bed. Burying her face, she prayed, in a manner that might well be called wrestling with the Lord and with her own soul—for guidance as to what to do, and power to do it—if—When she rose she was much exhausted, but she was quite calm.

"I must be sure," she said—"I am sure. My heart knew from the very first, and yearned toward him as only a mother's could. But I must prove it to myself, so that I may never doubt afterward."

She was wise enough to wait, however, till any impression caused by Dr. Valery's comment on the likeness between them, any emotion which had called the blood to Julian's pallid face, should have had time to die away. This soon happened. In Julian's state of feebleness and languor memory took little hold of any thing. Mrs. Winter could detect no change in Julian's manner toward her—no accentuated interest, or curiosity, or affection.

On the next Sunday Flora was again to be with her relatives; and Sister Martha, her patient's state permitting, was to have some free hours. During this time Mrs. Winter trusted to be able, without rousing suspicion in Julian, to secure as much proof as she needed—as much proof as her reason needed; her heart no longer needed any.

CHAPTER VI.

TORTURE BY QUESTION.

"And when she had well beholden him she said, 'Soothly, I dare well say that Sir Launcelot is his father, for never two men resembled more in likeness.'"

WHEN the Sunday afternoon came, Mrs. Winter and Julian were almost alone at the villa. At Julian's wish they had an "English tea" together, in familiar home-like fashion.

"This is very pleasant!" commented Julian, his loving eyes and sweet grave smile seeking the face of his companion affectionately. "It is very difficult to believe," he went on, "that a few weeks ago we were strangers to each other; still more difficult to feel that a few weeks hence we shall probably be so widely apart. What do you say to abandoning Miss Kennedy, and taking me in charge as your pupil instead? I think we could be very happy together. Don't you think so?"

"My God! yes!"

Receiving such answer to such lightly-spoken, loving, laughing question, Julian's life seemed to pause: he felt as if she had given him a blow.

After an instant, that to both of them seemed of incalculable length, she controlled herself, and managed to say,

"My exclamation startled you!" Then she added, "You are, or I fancy you are, so exactly what my own boy would have been by now, that my heart 'giveth unto you,' as the old writers describe it, in a way you can not understand."

"And mine to you," he might have answered, but for some inward check.

He was lying with his cheek upon his hand watching her, and now he took into his the beautiful shadow of a hand which had been so unwearied in his service, raised it to his lips, then kept it in his, saying,

"You are looking ill, dear lady—you devote yourself to me too closely. You hardly ever go out; you hardly ever get any rest. When you are not nursing me, that dreadful young person, Miss Kennedy, harasses and wearies you. Won't you go out now? The evening looks lovely."

"Oh no! oh no!" she answered, very hastily. "If I look ill, nothing done for you has or can hurt me." She drew her hand from his, and changed her position, drawing so far back that his eyes could not in that dangerous way peruse her face.

Julian wondered for a moment if in any way he had pained or had offended her; but he soon sank back, feeling very tired, and soon ceased to wonder or to think.

It was a soft, balmy spring evening. Julian, lying in pleasant invalid languor, was conscious of the beauty of the world and of the time, and of little besides. He watched light after light kindle on the far side of the bay, and reflect itself in the perfectly calm water. But by-and-by a little perfumed breeze that stole in and breathed upon him somehow seemed laden with memories of Alice—seemed to speak to him of Alice. Without knowing that he sighed—certainly not knowing why he sighed—he nevertheless sighed heavily. That sigh roused and startled Mrs. Winter.

"So young, and with troubles to make you sigh in that way!" she said.

Her tone was that of a mother to a child, and so low and soft that, as Julian did not answer, she thought perhaps he had not heard—that perhaps, as they had both been still and quiet some time, he had fallen into a doze, and had sighed in his sleep. If so, she must soon wake him. The precious hours during which she might be sure of being alone with Julian were passing rapidly away. When, if ever, would such hours come again? Any day might bring Julian's friends—any day might come Sir Everard's instructions that she should meet him at Marseilles. She felt as if with ev-

ery minute now something of her life was passing, and soon no strength to speak would be left in her. She was growing, in spite of the balmy warmth of the atmosphere, colder and colder. The beating of her heart seemed to grow heavier and heavier, as if it were trying to beat out her feeble life as soon as possible.

As every thing else grew weaker and weaker, one overmastering desire to do the thing she had resolved she must not, would not, do, strengthened; and this thing was to fall at Julian's feet, to cover them with kisses, and to press them to her breast, while she claimed him as hers—her son, her own, her very own, her all!

Presently Julian spoke, some trifling remark—something that just showed her he was not asleep. She did not even know what he said; but she, instead of the cautious approach to the subject she had planned, overpowered by the sense that, if she did not speak now, she would never speak at all, began abruptly,

"Your name, Farquhar, is a Scotch name. Was your mother Scotch, as well as your father? Were you born in Scotland?"

She was sitting behind him, her hand on the head of his couch, where she could just touch his hair. Julian paused before he answered; then he said, in a pained way,

"I don't know that my mother was Scotch, or my father. I was not born in Scotland."

That one answer of negatives seemed to her enough, but she persevered.

"Were you born in the north or the south of England? and am I wrong in my fancy that Farquhar is a Scotch name?"

"I was not born in England at all, but in India. Farquhar is a Scotch name, but it is my name by gift only, not by right."

She need not question any more; she had learned enough. But her hunger grew with its indulgence, and she felt as if, of all the world of things she had longed to know, she must try and grasp some fragments. She could not see how the young bright face had clouded over. When she could speak again, she questioned again.

"You told me a day or two ago that you have no mother. Did you lose her long ago, when you were very young?"

"I never knew her," was the brief, evasive answer, given in a constrained tone.

"She died, then, when you were a baby?"

A pause. When Julian spoke, the sweetness was not in his voice; it was harsh-sounding.

"I did not say that she died—I do not know that she is dead. God forgive me if I had almost said 'I wish I did know it!'"

"Doubtless she is dead," was pronounced by Mrs. Winter, in a voice as from a grave.

"Why do you say so?"

"No woman who had such a son could be in the same world with him and not be conscious of him—could be conscious of him and not claim him."

She would have said more; but feeling her voice thrill with passion, she checked herself.

"Ah, but if to claim him were to shame him!" cried Julian; and his young voice was stern, and on his smooth young brow came a frown, of which she seemed to know, though she could not see it.

"It could not be so, not as you mean, with your mother."

"I would give all I have in the world, and be glad all my life after, to work with my own hands for myself and for her, if I could find her, to be sure of that."

"You may be sure of that."

"Why do you say so?" asked Julian again; he tried to lift himself on to his elbow, so that he might see her face. But she turned aside as if by accident, and moved things on the table close to which she sat, as she answered,

"The children of shame do not have such faces as yours."

"But why, then," demanded Julian, "should I know nothing of father or mother? Why should I have no name which is my own name? Why should I have been left, when only a few months old, to the charity of strangers? What can this mean but shame?"

His face had flushed hotly. She knew such agitation as she heard in his voice might greatly harm him.

"Hush, dear boy!" she said, softly, putting her hand on Julian's head as she spoke. His agitation, and her fear of its effect upon him, controlled hers. "Hush," she went on, "or I shall not be able to forgive myself for having touched upon a subject that is so painful to you."

"Painful!" echoed Julian. "That is no word for what I feel about it." A moment after he added, "Forgive me; of course you did not know."

"Of course I did not know," she echoed, "but I might have known," sounded like an utterance of anguish. "It was no mere accident or curiosity that made me question you," she went on, impelled, as it seemed to her, by something stronger than herself, by a will warring with her own will. "A likeness which I find in you has brought so vividly to my memory the story of a friend that, if you will bear with me, if you will pardon me—"

"Who has a right to torture me by question, if not you?" cried Julian. "You, to whom I feel I owe my life?"

"It was rather you who saved mine!"

She, only, knew what double truth was in his words—as in her answer.

"There is not much I can tell you," said Julian, sadly and more quietly. "Please ask me any questions you like, and I will answer what I can."

"The name of Farquhar," she began, tremulously. "Do you know how you came by it? I have no memory of that name in connection with my friend's story."

"I suppose I came by it in the same way a

dog comes by the bone thrown to it." The bitterness of the boy's tone as he said this made Mrs. Winter shudder. "But no," he added, with a return to his own natural sweetness, "it is most thankless and unjust of me to speak in that way. Captain Farquhar—Captain Julian Farquhar—adopted me, in the fullness of loving-kindness. He gave me his name and every thing else belonging to him. He died suddenly in battle, while I was at college. If he knew the secret of my parentage, he took the secret with him. But I believe he knew nothing. Mrs. Burmender, his sister, was sure he knew nothing. Malicious tongues, of course, said he himself was my father. If it had been so he would have told me. He was as true and noble and generous as a man could be. I know but one like him—God forgive me my momentary bitterness of speech. I am without excuse for bitterness. My experiences have been of wonderful goodness and kindness."

"Thank God!" his hearer breathed inaudibly.

She said aloud,

"I fear I tire you. I make you talk too much."

"You do not tire me, though the subject does." And Julian wiped the moisture of weakness from his forehead as he spoke.

Mrs. Winter kept silence some time; then she spoke with a studied sort of quietness, as if she thought the quietness of her tones would save him from being disquieted by what they uttered.

"And is this Captain Farquhar," she questioned, "the first friend of whom you have any memory?"

"The first of whom I have any distinct memory. I hardly know if the sort of shadowy impressions of things and people earlier may be called memory at all. Neither do I know how to distinguish between what I knew because he had told me, and what I knew from this sort of memory."

"And what, in either one way or the other, do you know of any thing earlier?"

It was fortunate Julian could not see her face as she asked that.

"Only that I was left by my mother, when I was a few months old, with good and kind people, who had meant to bring me up as their own child, but who died suddenly when cholera devastated their district."

"Their name?"

Those two words might have been a shrill cry, but for the deadly sickness which hardly allowed her lips to open wide enough to let them through. Julian's hand went to his head.

"I could have told you before my accident. In a few days, when I am stronger, Dr. Valery says my memory will come back. Ask me then."

"Would to Heaven I could believe I should be able!" she groaned, inwardly. Aloud she said, "I am doing you harm—at least, I fear"

am doing you harm. And yet, for my friend's sake, a question or two more."

"For your sake, any number. As to your friend—if you are thinking that— In short, it may seem hard, cruel, unmanly, but I say to you, as I have prayed to God, let me never know my mother, if, knowing her, I must blush to know myself her son."

"Would no amount of love shown to you—of sacrifice that, however vain it proved, still cost its full cost to her, paid for you—no amount of temptation pleaded by her—nothing she had since done or suffered—move you to such compassion as we may all, by repentance, and by laying our burdens at the foot of the cross, hope to win from Heaven?"

"I will not say that—God forbid I should say that! But I may pray to him to spare me such a trial. Anyway, such birth seems to me the hardest, heaviest, most blighting curse that can be laid upon a man, poisoning the very fount of his honor."

In the woman's heart there was now a strange mingling of exultation and of anguish. Even women who have lost, as this poor woman had not, their own honor, are said to be often capable of a pungent self-martyrdom of joy in the sternness of the honor of the beloved.

"I could swear that you are not one of those on whom such curse is laid!" cried Mrs. Winter. Then she continued, in more measured tones, "The friend of whom I speak was not a good woman. She was selfish, passionate, uncontrolled, injuring most whom she loved most; but she was not what you dread your mother to have been. Her son's father was her husband, the best and worthiest and noblest of men. But for her sin and her folly, which were not such sin and folly as you fear, her son might have been her glory, never her shame."

"Who—where—this friend of yours—is she alive?" questioned Julian.

"She is dead—dead long ago," was the soft, slow, decided answer.

"Dead!" echoed Julian, who had slightly raised himself, falling back—"dead! And you think she may have been my mother? Dead! Then why—"

"Yes, why trouble you about a dead woman?" she interrupted, hurriedly. "I will tell you. Once, when I was very young, I passionately loved that woman's husband, before he was her husband—and after. You are like her husband, or so, it seems to me, like her husband as his son might be. For his sake I have longed to know about her boy."

"Who was her husband? Is he, too, dead?"

"I would give much to know. She left him; her boy was born after she left him. Probably he never had any suspicion that a son was born to him—he can not have had."

"It seems to me," said Julian, faintly—he was growing thoroughly perplexed and confused, and he could not help wondering that his usually so careful and so unselfish nurse should

him in this way—"that this woman you

speak of as your friend must have been your enemy."

"She was," was answered, with unreflecting passion—"my worst enemy. She wronged and robbed me of all that made life worth having. She robbed me of my home and my husband, of my very name; of existence itself she would have robbed me."

"I can not understand any thing now," said Julian; "but I should indeed be sorry to learn that this enemy of yours was my mother."

He sank his head deeper into the pillow, and closed his eyes. There was a long silence; she thought he had fallen asleep, as he was constantly doing, from very weakness. How weary and sickening seemed to her the monotonous rise and fall, and stroke upon the rocks, of the Mediterranean; the sound of the grasshopper was indeed a burden, and the metallic croak of the green tree-frog, from among the boughs of the olives—all so distinctly audible in the evening calm—exasperating.

"But you yourself, dear lady," presently said Julian, dreamily, "have been a mother, have had a son. Once, before you knew I had no mother, you said you envied my mother her son. I have often felt that, were your son alive, I should envy him his mother. I have often thought that life could hardly hold greater happiness for me than would come to me if I found my mother, and found her in a woman of whom I could be proud. Such a woman as you, dear lady, or" (thinking of Olivia Dacre) "as one other."

With a quick movement of jealousy, she was about to question who was that other, her rival; but she restrained herself, and Julian languidly continued:

"I will not think of that enemy of yours, of whom I will not speak harshly, as she is dead, as of my mother. I would rather think of you, you whom she wronged, than of her who wronged you, as my mother. You who have been to me as tenderly devoted as any mother could be to any son."

Some sound he did not understand came from where Mrs. Winter sat. The room was now quite dusk. He listened. His voice had been to her so penetratingly sweet that it had stirred in her a joyful anguish, or anguished joy, so keen that it had seemed as if it would take life away, as it seemed to take all power and sense to resist mere physical instinct.

"My God, help me!" was her cry; and a moment after she was kneeling by Julian, her arms were round him, his head was pressed against her breast, she was covering his hands with kisses. This was only for a brief minute. Then it seemed as if satisfied hunger had calmed her; she said, while Julian, between weakness and agitation, hardly knew what had happened,

"Indeed, I love you as if you were my son! I am such a lonely woman. My heart at times so thirsts for love, it has been very sweet to love you! Forgive me—forgive me for what I have

said, what I have done, this evening. I have not been a good nurse to-night. Kiss me once on the forehead, dear boy, and say, as if you were my son, 'Mother, I forgive you!'"

But Julian's feeble state was overtaxed by so much varying emotion. He heard her words as in a dream; a cold sweat broke out upon his forehead. He did not quite lose consciousness, but he had no force to move or to speak. Mrs. Winter was ready to kill herself with self-reproach.

"Always the same," she murmured, "even after all these years. Always injuring most those most beloved."

She bathed his forehead with ether, and she gave him wine; and just then came Sister Martha home from her afternoon holiday.

The quiet, suppressed, sick, routine bustle of wheeling the sofa back to the other room, of getting the invalid to bed, of getting his supper and finally settling him, ensued, and engrossed them all.

When it was over, Sister Martha said,

"Monsieur is by far not so well to-night. More feeble, and also more feverish. Had I left him with any one but madame, who cares for him as if he were her very own son, I would say he had been suffered, in some sort, too much to fatigue himself."

CHAPTER VII.

A BLIND FALLS.

"The past rolls forward on the sun
And makes all night. Oh dreams begun,
Not to be ended! Ended bliss
And life that will not end in this!"

"No letter for me? Again to-day no letter!" was Julian's question and exclamation next morning on the delivery of the post. "It is strange! It must either mean that Dacre was away from home, and has not had my letter, or it must mean that he is on the road—that he is coming. And yet he would surely have been here days before now if he had started at once, without waiting to write. I don't understand it. It is not like Dacre," was said, with some slight peevishness.

Mrs. Winter was in the room, at the window, adjusting a blind.

"What name did you say?" she asked, without turning round. "Whom are you expecting? It was to General Burmender you wrote? It is from him you are expecting to hear, surely?"

"Oh no! The poor old fellow! It was not to him I wrote, but to Dacre—Colonel Dacre. I must have named him to you. It seems impossible I should not have spoken of him."

"Never!" The blind fell with a crash, leaving the room dim. A servant just entering with Julian's breakfast dropped the tray, startled at the noise.

"Mrs. Winter? Are you hurt? Are you hurt?" cried Julian from his bed, anxiously, trying to see her, but not able to do so.

"No, no. The blind fell. That is all. It did not touch me, I assure you."

Sister Martha came in; there was bustle and confusion, clearing up the fragments of broken china and fetching fresh coffee. This fatigued Julian; leaning back, he closed his eyes. He had passed a restless night, and was easily tired.

Sister Martha, approaching the window to see to the blind, became aware of Mrs. Winter, whom she had not known to be in the room, crouching on the floor pale and faint. That she had been struck and knocked down by the falling blind was her natural idea. But it was not so, literally; she had been struck down by a name, and, failing to reach a chair, had sunk on the floor.

"Hush! It is nothing. It is past," Mrs. Winter whispered, letting the Sister help her to rise, and signing to her that Julian must not be disturbed.

She made every possible effort to rally, and, leaning on the woman's arm, left the room by the window, to sit down in the shade outside, where the fresh wind blew upon her and revived her.

That there could be two men in the army, as well as in the world, of the name of Dacre; that this Colonel Dacre need not, necessarily, be her Captain Dacre, was an idea slow to occur to her. But it did, by-and-by, suggest itself. If her reason received it, her heart rejected it. And he might be here any day, any hour! And it was he to whom her Julian had written as "best beloved friend!" How could this be? Hardly able to think, she yet felt it needful to act.

As soon as she dared trust herself she re-entered Julian's room. She seated herself by his bed, where the curtain half concealed her. But Julian immediately pulled it back, saying,

"I am so glad you have come. I couldn't get it out of my head that the blind had struck and hurt you."

"Oh no, it did not touch me. I am only sorry that my awkwardness should so have startled and disturbed you. I have left off being a good nurse. Sister Martha or Rosalie do much better for you now." So saying, she pulled the curtain forward again.

Julian himself began the subject she was hesitating to touch.

"It is hardly possible I have not spoken to you of Colonel Dacre," he said. "You must have forgotten."

"I should not have forgotten. It is you who forget how very little we have spoken at all of any thing. The only friends you have named in quiet talk have been General and Mrs. Burmender. In your delirium you often spoke of 'Alice.' It is only, you know, during the last few days we have had any talk; Dr. Valery's injunctions to silence have been so strict."

"That is true. Ah! well, if Dacre comes

you will see him and know him—that will be better than any speaking about him. One look at him will show you the kind of fellow he is.”

“I would like to hear you speak about him. I may be gone before he comes—”

“But he may come any day.”

“And any day I may have Sir Everard’s summons to take Flora to Marseilles.”

“But, if so, you would come back here again?”

“That is quite uncertain—is even unlikely.”

“But we can not part so—you and I! Any day! And our meeting again be left uncertain, even unlikely! It is impossible!”

“The impossible may have to happen.”

“And I must have you and Dacre know each other. He must thank you for all you have done for me.”

“Even what you ‘must have’ may not be,” she answered. “Your friend is, I suppose,” she went on, after a short pause, “a little older than yourself, or he could hardly yet be a colonel.”

“He is older—old enough, he says, to be my father. But he is no less my friend for that.”

“What is his Christian name?”

“Walter. His full name—Walter Dunn Dacre.”

Mrs. Winter leaned her head back against the wall. The curtain was held in a convulsive grasp. She was silent some while, and so was Julian. Presently, thrilled by a momentary anguish and horror, she asked,

“And ‘Alice?’ who is Alice? Not his daughter?”

“Oh no—oh no!” Julian answered, agitatedly. “I had almost said, in my mean selfishness, that I would to Heaven she were! Forget, dearest lady, that I have ever spoken of her—above all, never let Dacre know it. Perhaps, even now, she is his wife. She is, anyway, his—his Alice, with whom I have nothing to do. A fair girl, who has grown up for him, and whom he loves as such a man knows how to love.”

“He is surely old to think of love and of marriage? What age is this girl?”

“The age of the angels, whatever that may be.” Then, flushing at his own folly, he added, more soberly, “I don’t know her age exactly, but she is very young—about twenty, I should fancy, and looking even younger.”

“They are ill-matched, then.”

“Perhaps in years. But Alice—well, she is Alice; she loves him devoutly—devotedly. I can not fancy her the wife of any other man. If she should cease to love him she would cease to be herself.”

That Julian talked of Alice somewhat excitedly was not lost upon his listener.

“Why has he never married till now? To marry so late in life, and then to marry a child young enough to be his daughter, is hardly wise or noble.”

There was something of resentment in Mrs. tone.

“He has been married before; very few of his friends know it. His married life lasted only a few months.”

“And his wife—his first wife? What became of her? How does he speak of her?”

“With profound pity and tenderness.”

“What became of her?”

“She died by her own deed.”

“Having such a husband!”

“Such a husband!” said Julian. “A prince—a king among men; worthy of any woman’s passionate devotion! It was, I believe, poor thing, a sudden madness.”

“And this happened, I think you said, about five-and-twenty years ago; and yet your friend only now thinks of marrying.”

“I did not know I had named how long ago. I suppose it can’t be much less. I am sure you are ill to-day!” cried Julian, suddenly dragging back the curtain. “Your voice is not your voice!”

Her hands went up to her face to hide it as she said, “The spring weather makes me weak and languid.”

“It is not so much that as that you have worn yourself out in nursing me. I wonder if ever I shall be able to do any thing for you? When I have a home, will you come and make it seem home for me?”

He spoke half playfully, half earnestly.

“Please God, my boy, there may be a fair wife to do that.”

Julian shook his head; there was a long pause.

“I wish you would tell me more of Alice,” said Mrs. Winter.

“There is nothing to tell. She is just so perfect that there is nothing to be said about her!”

“It is more fit that she should be yours than his,” asserted Mrs. Winter.

“Don’t say so! You would not if you knew her and him.”

“And he loves her—loves this child!”

“She is fair and young, but she is wise; a child in purity, God bless her! but not in foolishness. Loves her! Indeed he loves her! All his hope of happiness in the years to come centres in her. He has had a sad life, and a noble one; always for others. If you knew him, you would love him; if you loved him, you would feel, as I do, that even Alice is not too precious for him.”

“And she, you say, loves him. But, being so young, perhaps only with duty and gratitude, as a daughter might?” suggested the temptress.

“She has grown up in the love of him. She loves him loyally, devoutly, staunchly. It will be her pride, her honor, and her happiness to be his wife. Possibly I should say it is her pride, her honor, and her happiness to be his wife.”

“And you, too, love her, poor boy?”

“I?” He flushed feverishly. “It is true, I love her, but not with disloyal love; or, if it

is so, I would tear out, if I could put my hand upon it, any traitorous fibre in my heart, sooner than wrong my friend. For me she is his Alice. If it was not always so, I have struggled and I have conquered. Alice is for me his Alice."

"Poor boy! Poor, noble boy!" she murmured.

There was silence. A silvery-toned bell rang out from among the olives on the morning mountain. Julian lay back listening, wholly unconscious of the complicated agony of temptation beginning in the woman beside him. She was interesting, mysterious; he was grateful to her, he even loved her, but his mind was so languid just now from physical exhaustion that it did not occupy itself long with any thing. The passionate scene of last night, for instance, was but very faintly remembered.

"It is not likely your friend is already married. He would have let you know."

"I should think so; but it can not matter to me except for the sake of my friend."

"But to me it might—to me!" she was ready to scream out defiantly, but she did not even whisper those words.

"How beautiful that is!" sighed Julian, as the bell ceased.

"Have you any photograph of Colonel Dacre? I should like to see what the man is like of whom you speak as reverently as if he were a beloved father." She said those words lingeringly, as if she loved to dwell upon them.

"In the breast-pocket of my jacket, in a small book, you will find his photograph."

But it was some time before she moved; she tried, but all power seemed gone out of her limbs. Her brain felt like a spot of burning heat, all the rest of her ice. Nevertheless, as yet she had hardly comprehended what things meant. One thing she recognized, that for the second time it was in her power to destroy the happiness of the one only man she had ever loved till she knew her son. She felt as if a breath might do it, or an incautious movement of her hand. For his sake she tried to say "Peace, be still," to the turbulent passions at work within her. By-and-by she got the coat, the book, the photograph. (It was long before Julian saw that photograph again, or knew what had become of it.)

"A noble face, is it not?" he asked. She had bent her head so low over it—was she short-sighted?—that he could not distinguish her face.

Just at that moment, after a light tap at the door, Miss Kennedy came in.

"A telegram!" she cried, "for Mr. Farquhar. I called at the post for letters as I passed, and this had just come. Aunt Adelaide brought me home, Mrs. Winter; she dropped me on her way; she is going on to Genoa. This telegram had just come. May I open it and read it to you, Mr. Farquhar? *There are no secrets in telegrams. It is from*

'Walter Dunn Dacre' to 'Julian Farquhar.' It says, 'I have been delayed. But before Thursday evening I hope to be with you.' Thursday, and this is Wednesday! What is Walter Dunn Dacre like, Mr. Farquhar?" Then shrilly, "Good gracious! what is the matter with Mrs. Winter? She's dead!"

Flora's outcry brought Sister Martha and Rosalie.

"She has fainted for the second time this morning," said Sister Martha.

Julian, obliged only to look on, felt miserably helpless. Mrs. Winter was very long in rallying.

"I don't think she has been well for some days," said Sister Martha. "She overtaxes her strength. If she were the mother to monsieur she could not be more devoted."

The Sister had stretched the poor lady upon the floor, with a pillow under her head. She was beginning to think of sending for Doctor Valery, when, at last, Mrs. Winter showed signs of returning life. As soon as she could walk, she allowed herself to be led to her own room and put upon her bed. But Julian's outstretched hand and pleading eyes claimed from her some special notice before she left him. She bent over him, re-arranging his disordered pillows, whispering to him to try and rest now; she touched his forehead with her lips. Her eyes, large and luminous, in what looked almost like a dead face, dwelt on his full of something which then overpowered him, which afterward haunted him.

He did not see her again that day. She lay upon her bed all the morning resting, they thought. In the afternoon, when he asked about her, he was told she had gone for a drive with Miss Kennedy. Whatever Mrs. Winter had been in youth—and certain flashes of eye and mouth, and certain thrills in her voice, seemed to hint that she might have been impetuously passionate—she had now for long years been sternly self-controlled; unless, indeed, it were rather that all those years so much of her had been as dead that there had been but little need of self-control.

CHAPTER VIII.

JULIAN'S DREAM.

"God make thee good as thou art beautiful."

"My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine."

THAT evening Julian either could not, or he dreamed that he could not, get to sleep at his usual early hour. It seemed to him as if, in a dream within a dream, he dreamed that he could not sleep, and then dreamed all that followed.

Sister Martha now considered him well enough to be left alone for the first part of the night, during which he generally had his softest.

soundest sleep. How seldom he was then alone she did not know! There were eyes which grugged to look on any thing else when they could look upon his face. Julian's dream this night was that some hours after the Sister had left him—the clocks were just striking twelve—he was lying, with closed eyes, but wide awake, and wondering why sleep eluded him, when he became conscious of a softly-opened door; but, wishing to escape the attentions of Sister Martha, he took care to give no sign that he did not sleep.

Some one came to his bedside, and, in his dream, he waited to hear the often-heard—for he had often been guilty of similar feigning—"He sleeps softly, the good God be praised!" piously ejaculated, followed by the sound of cautiously retreating steps, as Sister Martha should return to her well-deserved slumbers with easy conscience.

But the expected words were not spoken, and by-the-bye, he knew, though he could not tell through what sense the knowledge first came to him, that it was not Sister Martha who stood beside him. The breath was too softly drawn, the presence not palpable enough, and there was a slight, subtle sweetness, a suggestion of perfume, which he associated—not with the good Sister.

He dreamed, if it were a dream, that he continued to feign sleep, some instinct moving him to do so, through a time which seemed to him of incalculable length, and in spite of almost irresistible impulse to open his eyes, and to meet the gaze of which, through his closed lids, he was conscious, or so he fancied. And then, presently, there was a stir; that presence was nearer; there was the warmth of breath upon his cheek, and in his ear, so it seemed to his preternaturally acute senses, the muffled sound of heavy heart-beat. Then on his forehead grew the pressure of soft, warm lips, at first alighting there so cautiously as to be hardly felt, then gradually pressing closer and closer, and seeming as if they could not take themselves away.

In his dream Julian was then aware of inward struggle—struggle to yield to the impulse which bade him throw his arms about this woman's neck, draw her poor head down to rest upon his breast, while he cried to her the passionate question, "Mother?" But it seemed to him as if, as in a nightmare, some irresistible power held him down, and held him back, from doing what he strove to do. The lips sighed themselves from off his forehead. Was she going? Could one immense effort release him?

"God make thee good as thou art beautiful! God heal thee of all hurt and harm, and make thee strong! God give thee thy own pure heart's supreme desire!"

He knew that she was kneeling by him. *Those words he heard*; there followed less articulate breathings of prayer, and sighs that *ended as they must sigh out life indeed*. Then

came the little stir of her rising. Again she was bending over him. She laid her face cautiously on the pillow by his face, her lips to his lips, and lightly threw one arm across him; and then it seemed to Julian, in his dream, that his feeble senses failed him, and he lost consciousness.

When he came to himself, waking either from swoon or heavy sleep, he sprang up in bed: stirred by overmastering impulse, the impression left by that dream, he pulled back the curtain, stretched out his arms, uttered that word, cry and question in one, "Mother!" and found himself alone—alone, and strongly, deeply shaken by the tumult of blood and the hurry of heart-beat caused by his strangely vivid dream.

When Sister Martha soon after came to his bedside she said he had a little fever, and insisted that he should drink a composing draught. She sat by him through the rest of the night. Under the influence of the medicine he fell asleep, and slept late into the morning.

If Julian's had been a dream, then Mrs. Winter had had a kindred dream; but she had not known in her dream that, by just the sound she had made in shutting the door, she had lost another sound for which soul and every sense had been a-hungering—the sound of that one word "Mother," spoken by those lips—the lips of her son!

CHAPTER IX.

GONE!

"Could I see thee but once, one day,
And sink down so on my knee,
And die in thy sight while I say,
'Lady, I love but thee.'"

JULIAN woke to find the morning far advanced, and Sister Martha standing by him with his breakfast-tray. His first thought, and his first question, concerned Mrs. Winter; both question and thought were confused. Sister Martha answered him soothingly and evasively; but he was not so to be satisfied. He wished Sister Martha to call Mrs. Winter; he persisted in desiring to see her at once. The only reply his nurse would at first give him, that for the moment this was not possible, did not quiet him.

"Something has happened," he insisted. "Don't try to hide it from me. She is, perhaps, ill—perhaps very ill." Then the poor boy's overbright eyes dilated, and his cheeks took a curdly pallor, as he added, "She is not dead?"

"Oh no! oh no! nothing has happened—of harm. Keep quiet, be patient, and all I know I will tell you. Doubtless madame will, after a little, return. For the moment she is gone."

"Gone! You mean gone for a walk or a drive?"

"No, no. I mean that she is departed—that she travels."

"But where? and why? and when?"

"To Marseilles."

"To Marseilles? Gone! You don't mean she is already gone?"

He felt ill, overwhelmed with a sense of loss, of pain, of wrong done to him, of being balked and defrauded, though he did not know of what.

"Doubtless madame will return," purrs Sister Martha. "But a message from the young lady's father, as I understood, arrived in the night, and they needed to start early to meet him at Marseilles. This is all I know. Madame was naturally hurried. But she told me that monsieur's friend, a friend who is to him as a father, arrives to-day, or she would not, could not have left."

"Gone!" repeated Julian, and the word woke all kinds of echoing pain. Naturally it occurred to Sister Martha that her young patient's grief or annoyance was not without reference to the fair-haired girl whose pink-and-white beauty dazzled her own good-natured eyes.

"Mademoiselle was not a little angry," she said, soothingly. "She scolded and she cried, and she declared she would bid you good-bye. But madame, who would not have you disturbed, locked mademoiselle into her chamber till the carriage was at the door."

"Gone!" still repeated Julian. "Surely she left some message, some letter for me?"

"Of messages plenty, but every one of them stupidities that would not keep place in my head. As to letters, I will inquire."

"It is of Mrs. Winter I am speaking. Was there no message from her?"

"From her none. It is that makes me believe she looks soon to return; and, besides, of luggage almost every thing is left. She looks to return, rest assured. It is impossible, when one thinks of it, but that she looks to return, and soon. Otherwise it would be not a little strange that she, who devoted herself to you, so that had you been her own son she could not have done more, should go away without one word of adieu."

"Perhaps," hazarded Julian, the blood crimsoning his forehead as he spoke, and, at those words of the Sister's, "had you been her own son," he re-entered the atmosphere of that dream—"perhaps, in the night, she came to bid me good-bye, but found me asleep, and would not wake me."

"Not possible," answered Sister Martha, confidently and complacently. "I must have known. I sleep so light, so light the step of a cat would wake me, and I heard nothing."

So saying, having ended her arrangement of the room, she went away to ask if there were any letters, and to leave Julian to take his breakfast.

"Gone!" began poor Julian again. "She won't come back! I know she does not mean to come back. Gone! And this haste, this *strange trouble!* It is impossible all can end

so. She must be brought back. Dacre must go after her, and must bring her back. Gone! I could cry like a child. And why? It can't be only because I am weak; because it is sudden; because for all her kindness I had not thanked her. Gone! And last night? Was it a dream? And yesterday, those eyes of hers! What did they mean? Such love and such pathos! Gone! And I can't ask her what it means! And this wildly-improbable, romantic notion that has got possession of me, will keep possession till I see her again. Gone! Oh! if I could know that I should be an hour alone, I would cry—as a child cries after its mother! It must be that—that I love her—that she is my mother!"

Julian's head had been turning and returning on his pillow with feverish restlessness. Now it was still, his pale lips smiled softly to himself at himself; he repeated in a timid whisper his last word, "Mother." Then he flushed, shook his head, and muttered, "Impossible!" He tried to recall every thing that had passed between him and Mrs. Winter, especially tried to remember what words he had spoken that could have pained her. He got very hot, very tired; his head began to ache badly, and his pulse to hammer wildly.

Presently Sister Martha returned, holding, as in triumph, a letter, which poor Julian's eager, weak hand was stretched out to reach while it was yet afar off in the great room. He tore it open with immense, indefinite expectation, to find only a few foolish, forward sentimental absurdities from Miss Kennedy! He rent the paper in two, hardly read, asked for a lighted candle, and saw it burn.

"If I had a sister like this girl," he thought, "I should certainly wish to build her up in some high tower, out of sight and speech of men, till, if ever, she came to years of discretion."

But his thoughts almost immediately returned to Mrs. Winter.

Dr. Valery that morning found his patient in a very unsatisfactory state, for which it puzzled him to account. He had never been so well since the day he had walked those few steps. From this fact the good doctor was inclined to draw dismal auguries.

As the day went on, Julian's thoughts of Mrs. Winter grew more and more agitating. He missed her to his heart's core, and his heart seemed to ache with blind love and pity for her, while all the old pain, which the pressure of her hand, different from any other hand he had ever known, had had so much power to soothe, came back to his poor head.

"Just to have her back, if only for one day!" he kept repeating to himself.

It seemed to him that he had shown her no gratitude—that he had accepted all her devotion, and made her no return. And she was evidently a woman rich in sorrows, to whom love was very dear, to whom his love would be very precious.

Julian grew hourly more worn out, perplexed.

confused. His thoughts thronged about and concentrated themselves more and more thickly and closely upon the one idea from which he did not now even try to drive them away. For Colonel Dacre's arrival he now chiefly longed, in order that he might send him in pursuit of Mrs. Winter!

When Colonel Dacre came, he was told that the patient was suffering from a relapse, from a nervous attack, and was to be kept perfectly quiet. But Julian set all orders at defiance, and, alone with Colonel Dacre, poured out, in one confused, excited narrative, all that was in his mind with regard to Mrs. Winter, urging that Colonel Dacre should lose no time in pursuing her, and spare no effort to bring her back.

Colonel Dacre found there was no other way of calming Julian but to promise to do what he wished. In all probability he had crossed on the road those whom he was now required to pursue. He had some recollection of having met a traveling-carriage, in which sat a fair-haired girl, and an older lady, dressed in black, whose eager scrutiny of his face had raised a moment's wonder in him.

"And if I find your mysterious lady, Julian, my poor boy, what am I to do? what am I to say?"

"Bring her back to me."

"But it may be impossible that she should come."

"Implore her, for her son's sake, to come."

"I will do my best," said Colonel Dacre, laying his hand on Julian's forehead, "and you must do your best to quiet down."

Colonel Dacre was much saddened by the state in which he found Julian. All this feverish excitement and mysterious conjecture about Mrs. Winter he attributed to the delusions of disease. He himself was weary and travel-worn, reminded, by the nature of the sensations produced by so simple a journey, that he certainly was not as young as he had been. After only a couple of hours' rest he turned back again toward Marseilles.

Nothing more strongly marked to him how much Julian was different from his usual self than this most uncharacteristic absence of all consideration for any thing but the satisfying of his own desire.

BOOK VII.—MARSEILLES.

CHAPTER I.

SIR EVERARD HOPE KENNEDY.

"His hair, a sun that ray'd from off a brow
Like hill-snow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,
The golden beard that clothed his lips with light."

It was true that a message had come from Sir Everard in the night, asking for as early a meeting as possible at Marseilles; but, before the message had been delivered, Mrs. Winter had begun to prepare for her own and Miss Kennedy's departure. Just a few necessaries had been put together, every thing else could be packed and arranged afterward by the servants, if she and Miss Kennedy should not return to the villa, as Mrs. Winter knew they would not.

Mrs. Winter traveled in a dream. Miss Kennedy was sulky and silent, sleepy too, and did not disturb her. Before Mrs. Winter's eyes—between her and every thing she looked at—floated the face of her son, from whom every whirl of the wheels was taking her farther away. To see him again when?—ever? Never? One thing especially tortured her. Julian's face would present itself to her in the pallor, with the sunken eyes darkly lined under, and the sharpened features of death; would confuse itself with the beautiful face of the dead Christ in the picture of which she had first been reminded when she first looked on Julian.

More than once she was ready to start up in the carriage and order the driver to turn back, feeling as if, at any risk, she must once more see those dark eyes open, and with the light of life in them, that mouth smile with the mobility of life, the hue of life on those cheeks—crisp life, and not dank-hanging limp death in those dear, dark locks—warm life, and not death's clammy cold, on the smooth and beautiful white brow on which her lips would have loved to rest forever.

As the distance at which Julian was left behind increased, she sank more completely down into the despairing sense of the impossibility of this return, and she tried to prepare herself for the impending interview with her pupil's father, trying to know what she intended for the future. She expected to be asked to accompany Miss Kennedy, and her aunt, Lady Adelaide Masterman (who was going out to rejoin her husband), to India: unless she should oppose Flora's exportation, and recommend that she should remain longer in Europe.

Should she go? Should she not go? Could

she, either in India or elsewhere, continue her charge of Miss Kennedy? It seemed to her impossible that she should do so. Absolutely necessary that she should be free. Free to live or to die—to wander or to rest—to be here or go there, as the caprice of the moment, the passion of the hour, or the fatuous illusions of hope should impel her. To do her duty to her pupil—to justify the trust put in her by Sir Everard—was, she soon decided, no longer possible. But it was only after her glance had flashed against Colonel Dacre's, as they crossed each other on the road, that she fully and finally realized how absolutely, conclusively, beyond all doubt or debate, impossible! She owed Sir Everard a great deal. To give up her charge in this way would seriously grieve and annoy him; would, probably, also gravely inconvenience him. She could not help it. To go to India was utterly impossible. She must plead her powerlessness to endure the painful memories and associations connected with her former life there. To remain in office about his daughter at all, anywhere, was as impossible. She must plead overstrained nerves, and a weariness that must have rest, or she would die. Beyond this determination of what she would not, because she could not, do, Mrs. Winter believed herself to have no plans; unrecognized possibilities, faint, vague sketches of improbable contingencies, may have floated in the atmosphere as the dust floats, but no sunbeam of hope smote across the chambers of her mind to reveal their presence.

Mrs. Winter had, as much as possible, hurried on their journey. When they reached Marseilles, and went to the hotel at which rooms had been engaged for them, they found that Sir Everard had not yet come, but was expected by the next train from Lyons. It was early morning; Miss Kennedy went at once to bed. Mrs. Winter knew sleep to be unattainable. She left the confidential Swiss maid, Rosalie, in charge of her pupil, and, when she had re-arranged her toilet, went out. To be still—to sit down and wait, seemed out of the question. She walked for two hours with closed senses, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, of external things. When she returned to the hotel, Sir Everard had come. It fell in with her own wishes that he asked for an interview immediately on knowing that she was in the house. She received him in the handsome saloon from which her bedroom—beyond which was his daughter's—opened. "The room"

gaged for Sir Everard's party were the best in the hotel; therefore magnificent rather than home-like. Sir Everard had hardly spoken one sentence before she felt that his manner to her was changed from what it had been last time they had met. He thanked her for the promptitude with which she had responded to his summons, apologized for its abruptness, expressed surprise that she should have been the first to arrive, feared she must have overfatigued herself by too hurried a journey, inquired for his daughter—for the stranger-guest at the villa, and then came to a pause.

Mrs. Winter and Sir Everard had met seldom, for short periods, and at long intervals, of late. During the few first years of her charge of his daughter, this had not been so; and then there had, at times, been enough unmistakable tenderness of interest in the profoundly deferential, gallant courtesy shown by Sir Everard to his daughter's governess, to raise some speculation among his relatives and intimates as to whether "poor Sir Everard" meditated a second *mésalliance*. Mrs. Winter's conduct then had been, Sir Everard thought, nobly firm and frank. It had raised her higher than ever before in Sir Everard's esteem. But when he knew that he could not—as he would willingly have done—make her his wife, he had avoided seeing much of her. The cold and formal politeness of his manner to-day was something new from him to her.

As has been said, she noticed the change, but only vaguely. While he spoke her thoughts wandered far and wide. It was not what he might have to say, but what she had, that seemed to her of consequence.

While he talked, she observed, without knowing that she observed, except by the picture that dwelt on her mind afterward, how exactly of the hue of the morning Mediterranean, which she saw behind him, were Sir Everard's eyes (eyes that, by-and-by, more than once in the course of their talk, gave out phosphorescent sort of gleams of a peculiar intensity), and how that background of violet-hued sea brought out the golden coloring of his hair. Sir Everard, in spite of fair hair and violet-blue eyes, and a complexion that would show the mounting and retreating of his blood with an almost woman-like distinctness, was a stern and stately-looking man, with a marble-like mass of white forehead, and a close, grave, firm mouth, that doubtless would have had more sweetness in its firmness had his life been happier.

Sir Everard, having said all that cost him nothing to say, and all that it was not of much consequence whether he said or not, had paused.

"May I ask to have the windows shut?" said Mrs. Winter. "The noisy bustle of the street confuses me." In fact, she was so exhausted by mental and physical fatigue that, *just now, till she should be roused and stimulated by excitement, it seemed to her as if the whole world were swimming away from her,*

and it would soon be impossible to grasp hold of word or thought.

Sir Everard himself closed the windows, and then, evidently bracing himself up for a great effort, he said, with a sort of penitent grace shining through his sternness,

"I must begin by asking your forgiveness beforehand for what I am about to say, which sounds like deliberately planned offense. But I think—I hope—you know me well enough to know that I can not give pain without suffering pain. If I am about to pain you, it will be at the cost of pain to myself beyond any I can give you."

"I have little experience, and little expectation, of any thing but pain in this life. Please believe me more callous than you think. More truly courteous than I know you to be I can not think you, or I would." Mrs. Winter, so answering, was roused to a little listless wonder as to what could be about to follow such an exordium.

"That is not a speech calculated to make my task of paining easier," Sir Everard said, hastily.

"Is it not? I beg your pardon. Believe any thing said that will make it easier. I hardly knew what I was saying."

"You only put into words what I have always feared was the truth with regard to your life," he answered, gently.

To that she made no reply, and he went on:

"I must begin the subject on which I have to speak by saying that I have hardly any confidence in the veracity of my informant. My daughter is too like her mother to be trusted in any way. The tone in which she has written to me about this matter is, in all ways, distasteful to me; it is vulgar, and it is malignant." Sir Everard's face expressed bitter disgust as he said this. "I shall credit nothing more than what I hear from your own lips," he went on, "and nothing different from what I hear from your own lips. But you will, I am sure, understand, when I tell you that the girl has spoken to her aunt, Lady Adelaide, in the same strain in which she has written to me, that it is absolutely necessary I should be prepared to deny and to disprove to the full, or to account for what grain of truth may be contained in, a monstrous mass of falsehood and exaggeration, before I can ask you as, in my own interest and Flora's, I must earnestly desire to do, to accompany us to India."

Mrs. Winter's wonder began to give way to dim suspicion of the truth. Pitying the pain which had heightened the color on Sir Everard's fair face, she now hastened to speak.

"Perhaps, Sir Everard, it may save you a good deal, and me something, if I at once tell you frankly that I am unable to accompany Miss Kennedy to India, and obliged to resign my care of her, even should she remain in Europe. You must excuse my abruptness, for the sake of its motive."

Sir Everard gave the speaker a look in which

shocked surprise, amazement, anger, consternation, and incredulity were all expressed. Then his eyes fixed themselves on the floor, on which, with the toe of his boot, he traced out a pattern of the carpet. He remained silent. Of course his first notion could not but be that all he had heard was true. Could she mean to marry this man, young enough, according to every report, to be her son? Marry! He remembered that years ago she had told him enough to let him know that she was not free to marry; but then that was years ago. Things might have changed with her. Death might have changed them.

Mrs. Winter felt that he was waiting for her to speak further, to explain. But she felt, also, too weary to be able to concentrate her mind enough to know what to say. It was easier to wait for his questions, and then to answer, or to decline to answer them, as the case might be; she fully understood by this time what would be their subject.

Sir Everard, when at last he spoke, touched upon what to him, at all events at first sight, seemed the trivial and selfish side of the matter, saying,

"I have always known that your position with my daughter must be a harassing one—could not be, in any way, an easy or pleasant one. But I have done all I knew how to ameliorate it, in every way striving to increase Flora's subjection, and to uphold your authority. I did not expect, I could not have foreseen, that in this sudden manner you would abandon your post, and leave Flora on my unprepared hands."

"I asked you to forgive my abruptness, Sir Everard; I hoped you would attribute it to the true cause. From what you have said, I thought that, by hearing I wished to throw up my situation, you would feel yourself saved from the pain of discharging me. I would most willingly save you from pain. No words of mine could ever thank you for the constant considerate kindness, always shown most when most needed, which I have experienced from you."

"Why should you imagine I thought of discharging you? 'Discharging you!' What a phrase!"

"But, indeed, I think this interview, even irrespective of the necessity I now feel to be free, could end in no other way."

"You will not, I trust, say so when I tell you that I require no explanation from you of any thing you do not choose to explain. A simple denial of the truth of one or two statements made by my daughter will be sufficient. It is not for my own satisfaction that I require even this much. I know enough of my daughter to know the monstrous and malicious exaggeration, to speak in the mildest possible manner, of which she might be capable when under the influence of certain unworthy feelings."

"But suppose, Sir Everard, that I can deny

no charge brought against me by Miss Kennedy."

"I can not accept such a supposition," was answered, haughtily.

There was again silence; and during this silence Sir Everard took up, moved, replaced every trifle within his reach on the table, and avoided looking at Mrs. Winter, whose eyes were fixed meditatively on his face. She was pitying him; she was, also, rather pitying herself for being obliged to rest in the disesteem of a man to whose esteem his own character gave weight and value; but from these forms of pity her thoughts, as the silence lasted, slipped away. When, impatient of her silence, he by-and-by lifted his eyes to hers, his keen blue glance, in which she had always felt "clear honor shining like the dewy star of dawn," encountered her gaze, large and luminous with pathetic passion—for her thoughts had again gathered round Julian's death-like image of sleep.

"You are looking very ill!" he was suddenly moved to say.

"At least tell me of what I am accused?" she asked, with a wan, faint smile.

"Of nothing—but by my thoughts."

"But of what by your daughter's spoken and written words?"

"Of inordinate devotion to this young Mr. Farquhar, of a caressing tenderness shown to him, of caresses bestowed upon him—altogether of conduct toward him only becoming from a wife toward a husband, or from a mother toward a son."

A hot, angry flush was burning now on Sir Everard's cheeks. The faint smile flickering on Mrs. Winter's face, as she listened, had some exasperating effect upon him.

"From a mother to a son!" she echoed, with a wild throb of her heart, that sent a tide of emotional, youthful-seeming beauty over her poor face. She felt as if she must have let fly the truth and revealed her secret.

"But as you neither are nor could be that—"

"Who says so? I am old enough." Repenting her rashness, she added, "I had a son who, had he lived, would now have been of this boy's age."

"Of that I know nothing," answered Sir Everard, in as harsh a voice as he could use to a woman. A woman, too, whom he had loved with a respectful tenderness that had made him feel danger for her afar off, and scrupulously avoid placing her in any equivocal position. He now endured the disgust of jealous pain in having to believe that something at least of what he had heard was true. "Of that I know nothing. Anyway, you are not this young fellow's mother. And I, as a man of the world, tell you, what you have lived enough in the world to know without my telling, that you are too young still, and far too beautiful," he paused a moment, struck by the bloom and light that had come over her face—"far too beautiful," he repeated, "to escape

misapprehension and calumny, if you place yourself in a false position. So noble, so wise, so innately, instinctively pure as I have always felt you, I should have thought you the last woman in the world to give any man the right even to dream of speaking to you as I am doing. Surely you must know that to say, in excuse for caresses lavished upon a young man who a week or two ago was a stranger to you, that he might have been your son, far from screening you from scandal, would be counted arrant—excuse a rough word—humbug. He feels well enough, depend upon it, that you are not his mother, no kith or kin to him; not his mother, but a beautiful woman, whose tenderness, whose caresses might fool any man's heart out of his breast."

The Mediterranean blue eyes gleamed phosphorescently.

"He was at death's door, the poor boy!" murmured Mrs. Winter, in a stifled voice, with downcast eyes. The eyes were downcast to hide the glow in them, the softest warm flush was on her face, the strangest tumult of emotion in her heart. She was consciously thinking now, neither of Julian nor of Sir Everard, but of her husband, of Julian's father. Sir Everard's last words were echoing in her heart, but neither with the speaker of them, nor with him about whom they were spoken, was she concerned. Her attitude, her expression, were such as were natural to a woman who hears such words; but though she was thrilled with the matter and the manner of those words, she had no thought of the speaker; she was hardly conscious of his presence, even though his voice still rang in her ears.

CHAPTER II.

ALAS, POOR FOOL!

"I knock and cry, 'Undone, undone!
Is there no help, no comfort, none?
No gleanings in the wide wheat-plains
Where others drive their loaded wains?'"

LEANING her arm on the table, she screened her eyes with one of her almost transparently delicate hands, and yielded herself up to the warm flood of intoxicating hope, of new life in new love—love that yet was not new, but old—which suddenly seemed to course through her veins and to fill her heart. This man before her, still in the prime and pride of life, told her, in tones that carried belief with them, that she was still young enough, still beautiful enough, to inspire love. And she knew certainly now that the one man in the world for whose love of that nature she cared, was still in the world. And was he not hers, she his? If she claimed him, she claimed no more than *her own*.

She was obliged to give herself up to listening to a clamorous, imperious inner voice,

which, for the moment, deafened her to all other voices.

Beside the early spring of Flora Kennedy's blooming beauty, and with the consciousness how far behind and long ago was her own youth, her any hope or love, Mrs. Winter had grown to feel as wintry as the name she had assumed. But, now, first the mother had been wakened in her, and now the wife was waking. And the questions "Too late?" or "Is there yet time?" cried within her, and would be heard.

And there stood Sir Everard, little knowing what he had done, waiting for her to speak, speaking again before she could speak, pleadingly.

"I am altogether in the wrong. Forgive me. I said I would credit nothing that I did not hear from your own lips; and yet, though they have told me nothing, I fear I have spoken as if I believed all I had heard to be true. I ask your forgiveness—I ask it earnestly. I have the fullest faith in your ability to explain, more than innocently, all that needs explanation, and the fullest faith in the generosity which will lead you to treat me better than I deserve, to give an explanation to which I have no right."

It hurt her to force herself to attend to him. The strain, the stress, the action and reaction of feeling, seemed more than she could bear; something in her brain or heart seemed ready to give way.

But yet, when she moved her hand from before her face, and looked at Sir Everard, he was startled by her softness of bloom, by the dewy moisture of her always wonderfully beautiful eyes, by the palpitating emotion betrayed by something in the parted lips, and, as he then also noticed, by the quiver of the lace about her breast.

"It is for me," she said, very humbly, "to ask your forgiveness. A sudden something came over me, and sent my thoughts back over more than half my lifetime. I am very tired, too. I hardly know of what we were talking. Oh! yes, it was of charges brought against me by your daughter. Sir Everard, I can only say that, if Miss Kennedy has played the spy, she is no doubt able, without exceeding the truth, to report to you actions of mine that would naturally make you feel me unfit to continue my charge of your daughter. But as, for reasons of my own, I feel obliged to resign that charge, may not the matter end here, Sir Everard, with forbearance, and as much charity of judgment as is possible on your part, and on mine deep gratitude and cordial esteem?"

"It must end here, if you choose it shall," he answered. "But it seems to me you owe it to yourself—to womanhood, even—I will say nothing of any claims the friendship that has been between us might give me—to set this matter right."

"It can not be set right," she answered sadly, looking up into his face with soft, shining

eyes — “at least, I can not now, can not yet, see how it can.”

“It can’t be that you love—that you think of marrying this young fellow!” broke from Sir Everard, impulsively.

“God knows whether I love him!” she answered. “As to marrying him, I no more think of that than if he were my own son. I have left him, never expecting to see him again except by stealth, unless—unless, from being deservedly one of the loneliest, the most unhappy of women, God should see fit suddenly to make me one of the most blessed. Than that my death is more probable.”

There was a long silence. To Sibyl Winter time seemed neither long nor short. Sir Everard had risen and walked to and fro in the room in great, to himself not explicable, agitation. Mrs. Winter only sank deeper and deeper into the gulf of confused sensation, which could hardly be called thought. Presently Sir Everard stood in front of her.

“Mrs. Winter, I refuse to credit you against yourself. What you would leave me to believe is so utterly out of harmony with any thing I know of your character that I refuse to believe it. Why are you playing with me? Am I unworthy of your confidence?”

“Heaven knows my mood is no playful one! In one way it is bitter as death.” Suddenly taking a desperate resolution, she went on: “You are unworthy of no confidence. If I did not give you mine at once, it is that the happiness of others is involved; it is that every thing is so involved that”—her hands went up to clasp her brow—“that I don’t know what I dare do, if I dare do any thing.”

“Is it not possible I might be of use to you?” he asked, with extreme gentleness.

She only shook her head. Presently she went on, speaking hurriedly, passionately, as if in breathless haste,

“If Flora has told you that I laid my lips on that poor boy’s pale, beautiful face, and seemed as if I could never take them away; that I held him in my arms, and seemed as if I could never let him go; that I pressed his dear dark head to my bosom, and seemed as if I would hold it there forever—if she has told you these things, I can only say that what of them I have done, and what only longed to do, I don’t know, but that, anyway, this last time is not the first time my lips have been pressed on that face, that head has been in my bosom, my arms have been round that boy. Sir Everard, he is my son! I loved his father passionately—I passionately love my son; and what it has cost me, is costing me, will cost me to leave him, as I believe forever, God in heaven only knows!” She bowed her head into her hands and wailed, “My boy, my boy, my boy! Oh God! my boy!”

Sir Everard was pale enough now. That cry of hers thrilled him. It was not till, after a time, she lifted up her head and composed her face, and spoke, saying, “My secret is safe

with you,” that he said, in a voice at once stern and pitiful,

“Your son! And his name is Farquhar, while you call yourself Winter!”

“Neither he nor I have any right, by birth or marriage, to the names we bear. But there is a name—and a noble name—the name of a true, unspotted soldier and gentleman, to which we have both the right. I was the wife of my boy’s father,” she added, proudly.

“Am I permitted another question? Is it impossible you should claim your name?”

“I spoke falsely, saying I have the right to it. I had the right, but I forfeited it long years ago. Not by such sin as you will think, but by death. I tried to destroy myself. I let it be believed I had destroyed myself. All these years I have chosen to be dead. I have no right now to a life that must destroy the happiness of others. I can not claim my son and not claim his father. For my son is his father’s own son, with his father’s keen sense of honor. I load him with life-long misery if I give him a mother who can not give him a father. And his father—”

“Has married again?” broke in Sir Everard.

She bowed her head, bowing to the belief that this was so. And she wept as if she would weep very life away in longing, and in the bitter reaction from the foolish, flattering illusions (that would, nevertheless, by-and-by return) of a short while ago. Sir Everard went to the window, and stood looking out on shifting, hurrying crowds, on shimmering water, and saw all he looked upon as through a mist. A movement of Mrs. Winter’s roused him. She had ceased to weep; she had risen; she wished to end the interview. He turned and went quickly toward her, and took both her hands.

“It is not to be spoken of. I can say nothing. If there is at any time any service that I can render you, you will honor me by letting me be of use.”

He spoke with difficulty, and in a broken voice.

“There will be nothing. There can be nothing. I am dead. I must wait God’s time for resurrection. All the same from the depth of my heart I thank you for your kindness—for your nobleness, Sir Everard!”

She bent her head, and would have touched his hand with her lips, but he would not let her. He kissed her hand, and left the room hastily.

CHAPTER III.

SIR EVERARD’S PERPLEXITIES.

“I felt no sorrows then; but now my grief, Like festering wounds grown old, begins to smart!”

LATER in that day, when Flora had slept her sleep out, she was sent for to the room where her father and her aunt were sitting in solemn consultation.

Lady Adelaide, who had been telegraphed to at the same time as Mrs. Winter, had hurriedly obeyed the summons, as Mrs. Winter had done, but at a good deal of inconvenience, as all her plans had been made for joining her brother at Marseilles, at a later date. She had just now, but an hour ago, arrived.

Sir Everard had told his sister that Mrs. Winter's explanations had satisfied him that she was a woman as unhappy as noble-minded; but that she was forced to resign her charge of Flora, because her health was too broken to allow of her retaining it.

Sir Everard colored with vexation under the skeptical look of his hard-headed, shrewd sister as she said,

"We have, at all events, one great reason for gratitude toward the lady in question—a reason she will never, I trust, deprive us of. I must say it would have been a trial to have to call her sister. She is beautiful enough, and graceful enough, certainly; you remember I had never seen her till I saw her at Fiordimare; she has a Southern glow in her beauty, peculiarly attractive, doubtless, to Northern eyes. Nevertheless, I am thankful, beyond any thing I can say, that we are safely quit of her. A woman with a history which is a mystery, as you imply hers is, is not a woman for such a post as she has filled, much less for such a post as, at one time, she seemed likely to fill."

"I wish I could hope that the post she has filled would be half as well filled in the future," commented Sir Everard.

"Your girl must marry," decided Lady Adelaide. "She is now seventeen. So pretty as she is, she will soon marry in India."

"I shall still remain her father."

"You are really too bitter, Everard."

"I hope to Heaven it may prove so. Here she comes."

Disregarding the gloom and pain on her father's brow, Flora came dancing up to him, with malicious pleasure in her small bright eyes.

"It was all true, papa, wasn't it? Though you wouldn't believe it of your paragon. She couldn't deny any thing—now, could she, papa?"

"It was all false, Flora—utterly false, in the spirit, even if true to the letter."

"She has bewitched you," said Flora; and she went on to say things so audacious that Sir Everard lost his temper, and did what he had never done to a woman before, not even to the girl's mother, to whom such discipline might have been useful—he lightly boxed his daughter's ear, and bade her, now and always, be silent on a subject of which she knew nothing that was true.

Poor Sir Everard—whose conduct, from first to last, had been altogether without reproach in regard to Mrs. Winter—suffered a good deal, in a good many different ways, through her and on her behalf. Besides being pained and

assured by the impossibility of clearing a wom-

an he admired and had loved from the sort of cloud of aspersion and suspicion that had settled about Mrs. Winter, he was greatly and seriously inconvenienced by losing her services so suddenly, just at this juncture.

Mrs. Winter was not without vaguely sorrowful recognition of the way the widening circles of her own wrong-doing of long ago now touched the innocent with trouble; but any such sorrowful recognition could be only vague, for Sir Everard, with his chivalrous pity and pain for her, and his personal difficulties, seemed a *figuro* far off, standing on the shore of some other life. While between her and him, at this her resurrection-time of dead griefs, dead joys, dead hopes, was such a tumult of personal, passionate emotions, and of contending impulses as made all else indeed dim. When he had left her that morning, what had she done?

She had gone into the adjoining room, and, standing there before a mirror which reflected her from head to foot, had repeated to herself some of Sir Everard's words. And the thought of her heart had been,

"If he calls me beautiful, if he feels me beautiful, why should not my husband?"

Standing there, still looking at, after she had ceased to see, herself, she followed out the intoxicating imaginations suggested by that question. Till, rousing herself from this delicious delirium of dreams to the bitter dust and ashes of reality, she cried,

"Oh, fool, fool, fool! Do you forget that he never loved you? He never loved you! Why should he love you now? You fool, you fool!"

And she remembered "Alice"—Alice, whom to love as a daughter would, she thought, be so dear a delight; Alice, whom he now, perhaps, called wife; the Alice of whom Julian's words had taught her to think as fair, sweet, young, pure, and unspotted from the world; wise, true, devoutly loving.

Thinking so of Alice, how could it but seem to Sibyl that she would be more fiend than woman, if now—even if it were yet possible to do this without staining the innocent eyes and serene, shining brow of this tender girl—she should pluck this loved and loving Alice from his bosom, and, for the second time in her life, now in full knowledge of what she was doing, as then in utter ignorance, thrust her unloved self upon him.

"Of my own free-will," she told herself, "I chose death. I forfeited my right to be alive. Dead I must remain. Even what of life I have kept is now forfeit; it is a danger and a peril to others."

It seemed as if, indeed, from such meshes as she had wound round her life there was no being free in this life.

In obedience to her father's stern command, Flora by-and-by came to take a formal but quite respectful leave of "Mrs. Winter." She was to start for London that evening with her fa-

ther and her aunt, where family council was to be held as to her future.

After they had left, a letter was delivered to Mrs. Winter from Sir Everard. It inclosed a check for an amount far larger than any thing that was "due" to her, but with such words as made the return of any part of it impossible. At the same time, she was told that the apartments she was occupying had been retained for her, and prepaid for the next week. And so ended all relation between Sibyl and Sir Everard.

CHAPTER IV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

"Though time has plowed that face
With many furrows since I saw it first,
Yet I'm too well acquainted with the ground quite
to forget it."

WHEN Colonel Dacre, who had had a breakdown on the road—a wheel coming off his carriage when he was some miles from any place where repairs could be effected—at length reached Marseilles, and discovered to what hotel Mrs. Winter had gone with her charge, he found he was too late. He was told at the bureau of the hotel that Sir Everard and his party had started for London the previous evening. This information, after all his haste and anxiety, seemed to bring him to a blank pause. He could not at once decide to follow them by the first train. The state in which he had left Julian made him feel that impossible, and yet to return to him with only this lame account of his expedition to give seemed as impossible. Besides his deep disappointment on Julian's behalf, there was also some balked curiosity, more than curiosity, on his own.

He postponed any final decision as to what he would do, feeling that he required a few hours of rest; besides which, the next quick through train did not start till evening, and he would gain nothing but extra fatigue by going by any other.

He breakfasted in his own room, coveting the comparative quiet; employed a couple of hours afterward in writing; then, preferring to insure the dispatch of his letters by posting them himself, he was descending the stairs, when he saw, apparently about to enter an apartment on the first floor—his own was on the second—a lady who so immediately identified herself with Julian's description of "Mrs. Winter," and with the impression left upon him by the face that had flashed by in the traveling-carriage, that, on the impulse of the moment, he paused, and lifted his hat.

The lady, whose hand was already on the fastening of the door, attracted by the movement, turned; till then he had seen only her side-face, now she confronted him. Her eyes, large, full, soft eyes, at once tender and timid, prominent enough to give the effect of being

permeated by golden light, remained fixed on Colonel Dacre's face, while every tinge of color that death could have displaced left hers, and left it ghastly. For the moment Colonel Dacre was occupied in seeking for his card-case in various pockets, and then selecting a card. Offering this to the lady, he said,

"I think I can not be mistaken, and if I am not, the name here, my name, may not be quite unknown to you; you may have heard it from my young friend, toward whom your unbounded kindness—" Here Colonel Dacre stopped, alarmed at the change he now saw had come over his listener's face. Then he added, "Excuse the hasty, ill-considered abruptness of my address. I fear I startled you. But I feel sure I can not be mistaken—that the mistake is elsewhere—with those who told me that Sir Everard Hope Kennedy and his party left Marseilles for London last evening."

"That is true," she answered, leaning heavily against the door, moving her stiff white lips with evident difficulty, looking as if the next moment she must sink on to the ground; "Sir Everard Hope Kennedy and his party—all his party—left Marseilles yesterday."

"Then—" he began, intending to say that he had only to apologize; but her eyes perused his face so strangely, so hungrily, so passionately, that he was impelled to say instead, "Forgive me if my persistence seems impertinent. But, without your direct assurance to the contrary, I can not but believe that you are the Mrs. Winter whom my young friend, Julian Farquhar, has implored me to find and to bring back."

"My name is not Winter." She just managed to utter that. She would have gone on to say, "Nor do I know any thing of your young friend, Julian Farquhar," but power of utterance failed her. Why not pass into her room and close the door between them? What mattered what he thought of her, so that he did not find her out? What mattered what became of her, so that she did not spoil life for him? She simply could not open that door to close it between them.

Colonel Dacre felt her answer to be an evasion or a falsehood. Making a half movement, as if to pass on, he begged her to accept his apologies, adding that he was deeply grieved, for his young friend's sake, to find he was mistaken, for his friend was suffering from a relapse, an access of nerve fever, and the news of such a failure in the fulfilling of his errand would go hardly with him.

The agitation of her face, and the way she said the only word she could get out, "When?" were enough to betray her. What she had wished to ask was when the change for the worse had set in. Colonel Dacre's grave, kind, compassionate, irresistible sort of smile showed her she had betrayed herself.

At that moment a noisy party of Americans entered the lobby of the hotel, and began to ascend the stairs. She said hurriedly, almost

wildly, blindly struggling to open her door as she spoke (he had to do it for her),

"I must hear about him; he was my patient, I was his nurse—I got to love him. I must hear about him."

As she spoke she swiftly, but with a swaying motion that made him once stretch out his arm, thinking she was about to fall, crossed the great gay room, to seat herself in its darkest corner, and with her back to the light.

Colonel Dacre, obeying the motion of her hand, seated himself opposite to her, and immediately began to talk to her of Julian, wishing to give her a chance of getting calm. As he talked, sometimes the golden-tinted darkness of those eyes glowed on him from out the deathly blankness of the face, sometimes both face and eyes were hidden by her hands. For very hearing of his voice she was sometimes deaf to what it said, although he spoke of Julian, her son! When he finished by saying,

"It seems to me that nothing will do Julian any good—nothing will calm him but to see you again, and so to get over the sort of shock of such intercourse so abruptly broken off. That I was to bring you back to him were his last words; I was to implore you, for your son's sake, to go back with me to him."

"Impossible!" she cried; the word was rather let fly than spoken.

"If that is your final answer," he said, "it is an answer I shall find it very grievous to be the bearer of to my young friend."

To this she replied, in a studiously controlled tone,

"And it is grievous to me to deny any wish of my dear patient's. But that I should return to him is impossible."

Colonel Dacre bowed his head. He had a feeling of something to be listened to—of something he must try to remember, which suddenly came over him.

And how was it with her? Sitting there opposite, so close she could have stretched out her hand and touched his hand, the man who had been the passionate love of her girlhood; who had been the young husband of her youth; who had been—who was, the one love of her life, the father of her boy, of her Julian!

As he sat there, the strong light fell full upon his noble face, bringing into high relief its lines of care, of suffering, of sadness, of endurance. She felt as if all the love she had ever had for him was nothing to the love with which she could love him now! In a sort of stupid way, she wondered how soon the moment would come when something would rouse her from the sort of lethargy which now seemed to hold her harmless, and she would find herself at his feet, clinging about his knees, pressing herself against him, covering his hands with kisses. Wondering when this moment would come with the same mind and heart that vowed it *should not come, that found in every line of care and sadness fresh reason why her unloved shadow should never darken the late Indian*

summer of his happiness of whose life she had spoiled the spring.

Lifting up his bowed head, he looked at her.

There was question all over his face. She tried to avert question from his tongue—asking him, brokenly, to get her, from the cooler on the side-board, a glass of water.

"I am not strong," she said. "I had walked fast. And then—"

She did not end her sentence. Colonel Dacre brought her the water, stood by her while she drank it, took the glass from her hand and set it down, feeling as if in a dream. She would not meet his eyes, but, when he did not look at her, devoured his face.

"And then I startled you," Colonel Dacre supplemented, "which was an ill way of repaying your exceeding and untiring goodness to my friend." He said that in a low-toned voice, that had in it something soothing and tender, something that to her seemed excruciatingly sweet.

"Are you alone here—alone in Marseilles?" he asked; "in such evidently weak health it does not seem right that you should be alone."

"Alone here, alone in Marseilles, alone in the world!" came her answer; and Colonel Dacre again felt, this time more strongly, as if he were listening to scattered echoes of something familiar in some long past.

Again he bowed his head as if, this time, something weighed it down; again he kept it some time bowed, and seemed trying to remember. And again when he lifted his head (as he did this, he also slightly shook it) his face was full of question.

But what he said had no reference to any past.

"May I venture to ask," he began, "if you intend seeking another engagement? If there is any way in which I could be of any help to you in any thing? I feel myself," he added, "under the deepest obligation to you for the devoted kindness you have shown to one whom I love as if he were my own son. To be of any service to you would be a relief to me, as well as a most true pleasure."

"You love Julian as if he were your own son," she repeated, softly; still more softly she breathed out, "Thank God!"

But he caught her words, and the flash of surprise that lightened from his face recalled her to the necessity of caution and self-control. She was much calmer now than at first; what she next said she said quietly.

"You look surprised that I should feel so fervently about my patient! But I am a woman old enough to be his mother; and he was so sweet, so grateful, so thoughtful and considerate, that any woman brought into such contact with him would have come to love him, and certainly I did. I have heard him speak of you—you must know how he would speak of you. Therefore it is not strange, is it, that I who love him, almost as his mother might, should thank God to hear you say you love

him as a son? With the love of such a father, he should, indeed, do well without his mother. But that such a gentle, loving soul, in so sweet a body, should go fatherless and motherless, seemed sad."

"No love wakened by Julian could surprise me," he answered. "Now, out of loving kindness to Julian, to soothe him, could you not tell me some way in which Julian and I could help you?" This was said with a tender sort of persuasiveness.

At that moment she felt his eyes both so penetratingly sweet and so piercingly keen, that, involuntarily, she covered her own with her beautiful shadowy hand.

Before she removed her hand she had been able, being, at all events of late, well accustomed to the spiritual exercise of prayer, still further to steady herself by a few moments of fervent supplication, to be saved from her own passions. She answered, in a low, sad, sweet voice of somewhat broken music,

"You and Julian are very good. Sir Everard, too, was very good. But I can only thank you, and say to you, as I said to Sir Everard, there is, there will be, there can be, nothing to be done for me. Still, I thank you most deeply; and, believe me, life—ay, and, when it comes, death—will be the sweeter to me, and the world is brightened for me, by the knowledge that you, and Julian, and Sir Everard find in me something worthy to awake your kindness. I shall not, thank you, seek any other engagement. I am not fit for any responsibility. I have enough to live upon as I shall wish to live—not in such rooms as these, which were retained for Sir Everard—during the few years likely to be left me. No doubt you know the passage that has been echoing in my mind of late—

'Those short days I shall number to my rest
(As many must not see me)—shall, though too late,
Though in my evening, yet perceive a will,
Since I can do no good, because a woman,
Reach constantly at something near it.'

It is in this spirit I would wish to end my life."

Calm enough to be able to remember and to repeat those words! Her calm surprised herself. It might be chiefly that of physical exhaustion—the ebb tide even of passion; but in it was some nobler, diviner element than that, and something which brought the moisture into Colonel Dacre's eyes—the quiet completeness of resignation, which seemed, he thought, to speak in her tone, touching and moving him as nothing else would have done.

The conviction that he was in the presence of, was listening to, speaking to, Julian's mother, had insensibly grown upon Colonel Dacre. It was this conviction which made him refrain from urging, almost to insistence, as he might otherwise have done, Mrs. Winter's return with him to Julian. Loving Julian as he did, and setting honor before every thing, he shrank from making any movement toward disentangling a mystery which might involve Julian

in dishonor. And yet his heart was strongly drawn out of him toward this woman.

Colonel Dacre rose and took up his hat. He felt himself dismissed—felt he ought to be going—felt that, for Julian's sake, it might be better he should go. And yet he was conscious of a great and strange reluctance to end this interview. That this, and this only, should have passed between them seemed to him painfully unnatural. She trembled, but only, she hoped, to her own consciousness, when he said, "It seems curiously impossible that we should part now as strangers, with no definite hope of meeting again."

She tried to answer him in a way that should drop a veil of reserve between them, saying,

"And yet, what reason can there be that we should meet again? I have not even, except in your generosity, any claim upon your gratitude. The little I may have done for your friend was, after all, no return for what he had done for me—for me and for Miss Kennedy. He saved our lives at the peril of his own, rushing into danger to drag us out of it. The little I did for him was done out of the fullness of loving pity, as ungrudgingly as if it had been done for my own son."

In spite of herself, a blush that took ten years from the age of her suffering face suffused it as she ended, and made her feel how ill, if she wished to keep all her secret, she had chosen her words.

"And Julian, poor boy, is worthy of the proud, as well as the pitying, love of any mother," said Colonel Dacre, moved to say that, though it was not the sort of thing he would have chosen to say—"worthy," he went on, "of the proud love of mother, father, brother, sister, and bride. And of all these the poor lonely young fellow has neither."

She did not trust herself to speak. And now one consciousness absorbed her—that he was going—that a few moments, and the place where he had stood would be empty.

CHAPTER V.

WHOSE EYES?

"To me, thou knowest, every thread
Of silver in the rich dark hair;
The very drooping of the head,
Telling the pressure of long care,
Could but be felt as claims the more
For love far deeper than before."

He changed his feet upon the ground; he changed his hat from his right hand to his left.

"He is going!" she thought. "Another moment, and he will be gone. Every thing will be over—the world will be at an end."

Clutching at any excuse to detain him, to retain, too, some shred of him, as it were, she said, pointing to writing-materials upon the table,

"Perhaps, Colonel Dacre, you would be so good as to write for me—Mr. Farquhar having, he tells me, no settled home—an address at which a letter of mine could reach you, and be forwarded to him, in case—" she paused, "in case, in spite of what I have said, I might some day want to know such an address."

It had occurred to her that possibly she might so arrange her life, hiding somewhere not far from her husband's home, that, if she could some day be quite sure she had but an hour or so to live, the supreme anguish of death might be preceded by the keenest joy she could picture, and she might rest in his arms, die upon his breast! At that thought, of resting on his breast, having his arms round her, there rose in her such a passionateness of longing as almost overpowered her. For such a moment no price could be too heavy to pay, only she must have a care that the price was paid in her tears, in her blood, not in the tears or the blood of the innocent.

"The address which is printed on my card would be sufficient," he gently reminded her.

"But write it. Write it for me in full!" she urged, imperiously.

"Mine are such crabbed characters," he observed, preparing to obey her, "difficult for any one not familiar with them to decipher."

He took a sheet of paper from the blotting-book and wrote, "Heatherstone, near Monkstowe, Yorkshire, England." Having written which, he paused a moment, and then added, "Where I hope some day to make my sister, Olivia Dacre, and the lady for whom this is written, known to each other."

How she watched him as he wrote! She noted the droop forward of the gray hair, as he stooped, which she remembered in that hair when it was rich and dark. The gesture with which he pushed it back was just the same.

"Sign it!" she begged. Begged or commanded. It was difficult to say whether there was most of entreaty or of command in her tone. He slightly smiled, wondering; and then looking up sooner than she had expected, he met her full gaze and was arrested, startled, by its ardent, penetrating passionateness. She crimsoned under the question of his eyes, and in a weak, helpless sort of way put her hands up to her face.

When she could speak she said, letting her hands drop,

"I was finding, or fancying, a likeness between you and your—your young friend." She had almost said "your son!"

"You are not the first who have found or fancied, as you express it, some such likeness. And yet, though I don't know Julian's parentage"—this he said with some significance—"I know that we can not be even distant kith or kin."

He had folded and he now gave her the paper on which he had been writing. She unfolded it and read what he had written.

"You are so good as to express a wish that

I should know your sister," she said; "why not your wife?" The last words were flashed upon him with a startling sharpness.

"I am not married," was all his answer.

"But you will be! You are just going to be."

He smiled, and his smile was so tender, youth-giving, transfiguring, that it showed Sibyl what happiness might do for him.

"Julian must have told you that, or you would not have guessed it—at my age."

"It is true—is it not? You are going to marry 'Alice.'"

"Did Julian talk much to you of Alice?" The transfiguring light was gone, and again Colonel Dacre stood gray in the twilight of the many years that had passed since she had before known him. It was the difference between a landscape at the last moment of glorifying sunshine, and at the next moment when that sunshine has faded off it.

"He spoke a little about your Alice," she answered, quite timidly, but with the sort of timidity a wife shows to a beloved husband whom she fears to pain or to offend; she had laid a slight stress on "your."

"And what did he say of her?"

"For one thing, that you love her profoundly."

This to her, the poor woman who spoke, was the more important part of the matter, but not to him.

"He said what was most true. Do you mind telling me—but why should you—any thing else he said?"

"He said that this Alice loves you devoutly and devotedly; that she has grown up loving you, and loves you with all her life; that he could not fancy her still Alice if she loved any one else."

"She loves me, God bless her! loyally and well; that I can not doubt."

"Yet you speak with some reserve. But, indeed, you must think me mad."

"Indeed I do not. I understand, at least in part, how all that touches Julian must interest you; and possibly you may have learned, or guessed, how nearly this touches Julian." A pause. "In fact—" Then another pause. He passed his hand across his forehead. "It is strange, but I don't know that I ever felt less disinclined for confession, and to ask advice. Perhaps the very fact that we are strangers to each other, meeting to-day for the first time—" Again he paused, as if with the sound of those words had come a doubt or question of their truth. "Meeting to-day for the first time, and, I fear, with little probability that our paths should ever cross again, makes it easier for me to speak."

"Strangers to each other, meeting to-day for the first time, and with little probability that our paths should ever cross again!" she echoed, and in a tone the peculiarity of which must have attracted his attention, but for his own embarrassed preoccupation. "I will take with me, to my near grave," she went on, "any confidence

you may choose to place in me. You may trust me."

"I am sure I may," he answered. "I feel you to be a noble and a wise woman."

Nevertheless, he still seemed to hesitate to speak—with no consciousness of what, by that hesitation, he was inflicting—of what to her was the anguish of suspense.

How strange it appears that human beings can be so close one to the other—so close that, literally and physically, they may be said to breathe one another's sighs—and yet can remain ignorant one of the other's agony, when the agony is such as it would seem the very air itself must be conscious of!

When at last he spoke, it was with a hoarse sort of abruptness.

"What, in the abstract, do you think?" he asked, "of such marriages as mine would be? So old a man—so young a girl?"

"My God! how can I answer?" broke from her, but in so stifled a voice that he did not catch the words, though he saw the sudden excitement that blazed in her eyes. After a moment's sharp struggle she said, in a measured manner, "How can I answer such a question? In such marriages, all must depend upon character; about such marriages, in the abstract, I can therefore pronounce nothing. In this instance, all that I heard from Julian of Alice—of how she is older than her years in wisdom—of how completely she loves you, and lives for you—seems to promise for the happiness of such a marriage."

"You would not, then, counsel me, either for Alice's sake or for my own, to give up the thought of this marriage?"

The "no" which now came from Sibyl seemed wrung out by excruciating torture. She stamped her slight foot upon the floor, he thought, in physical pain; but in truth with the feeling of stamping life out of the impulse which she called temptation. And she cowered back into a corner of the sofa, almost killed by the wild beating of her heart.

For an instant Colonel Dacre was thrilled with something more than compassionate sympathy, with awe and amazement. Then, as he saw the poor woman cowering there, grasping at her side, he thought he understood that the almost shriek in which her last word had been spoken was due to some sudden acute physical pang.

He entreated she would tell him what to do, whom to summon, would let him fetch, or send for, a physician, a friend of his own, in whose skill and kindness she might trust. She did not give him any answer; but, when he bent over her, asking if he could give her ease by changing her position, she clutched his arm with convulsed fingers, and pressed her forehead against it as if she would press into it—as he supposed, in the agony of her physical anguish.

After a few moments she gently pushed him away, and sank back. At his urgent demand

to be allowed to get or to do something for her, she only shook her head. She felt as if every thing were past now, as if she need not be afraid of herself any longer, as if the calm of death had come; and, indeed, she looked as if death were close at hand.

"Of what were we speaking when the pain seized me?" she by-and-by asked, in a voice of intense quietness.

To his request that she would not trouble herself to speak, that she would rest, that she would allow him to call in his friend, she answered,

"It is very good of you to be so anxious, but the acute pain will not return now it is once past. No physician could do me any good. It is this pain which will kill me; the sooner the better. The time seems long till the end comes. I am very sorry to have distressed you by the sight of my suffering. You are looking quite pale!"

That wifely tenderness of concern which takes an almost maternal tone, pierced through the quietness there, adding to his bewilderment.

"We were speaking, I remember, of your marriage. You were so good as to consult me. If you love Alice as Julian says you do, and Alice loves you as Julian says she does, I can not but think that the marriage will be happy—for both. I say this is my best judgment, and as a dying woman." (She believed herself to be so as she said it.) "But," she then added, "perhaps Julian, with the warmth of a young man's imagination, overrates your love for Alice?"

It was not from a dying woman, but from one still vividly alive that the last words came.

"That he could hardly do!" was answered with fire and force. "I won't say, as a young man might say, I could not live without her. If it were God's will I could live, and, I trust, could do my duty without her, and the world might not see much difference. Life might have no sunshine in it—no sunshine, no sweetness, no flowers—but a man can live and need not even be miserable without sunshine, and sweetness, and flowers. That is what a middle-aged man knows, and a young man does not know."

"But your life ought to have sunshine in it, and sweetness, and flowers."

"I have lived without them."

"The more reason you should have them now. May I venture to ask why you have lived so long without them?" Faintly and feebly she questioned that.

"Early in life I had a sobering experience. A very sad one. Perhaps it made me self-mistrustful."

"The loss of some one you loved?"

Her death-like calm was giving way. As she said this her eyes had an almost insane eagerness in them; she sat up and leaned forward.

He paused before he answered. He was

not looking at her. His eyes had fixed themselves upon the water seen through the window; he was looking back along his past. She repeated her question, and now he answered her.

"The loss, in a very shocking way—in a way which has made the memory of it a life-long remorse—of a being for whose happiness I had made myself responsible. Since that time I can not feel as if I had any right to happiness; and yet I can accuse myself of no intentional ill-doing."

"God knows you can not! And any woman looking in your face would know it."

Once more he was startled. Was it for the sake of what likeness she saw in him to Julian that she spoke to him with a passion like that of love in her voice?

She had sunk back again, and again had screened her eyes with her shadowy hand.

"He never loved you, poor fool! Poor fool! you see that he never loved you!" she was saying to herself. And now some movement of Colonel Dacre's making her believe that now, at last, he was really going, she forced herself to ask,

"If you have any photograph of Alice with you, would you mind letting me look at it?"

With an almost boyish bashfulness, and a blush perceptible through the bronze, Colonel Dacre drew from his breast-pocket a little violet velvet case, out of which he took a large gold locket richly wrought, inclosing a very perfect photographic miniature of Alice.

Sibyl took it into her shaking hand, clasping that wrist with the fingers of her other hand, to try and steady it, and pressing her arms against her breast. It would not do. The heavy, billowy throbs of her heart shook every thing. She pulled a small table toward her, laid the miniature on that, and gazed down into its eyes.

Trying to speak with judicial dispassionateness, Colonel Dacre said,

"No photograph can give you much idea of Alice. It tells you nothing of the perfect purity and delicate flower-like bloom of her complexion, such a complexion as is hardly ever seen, except in a little child. And nothing of the crystal-clear depths of her innocent eyes, nor of the peculiar shade of gold of the soft hair that lies like a cloud of light on her forehead. There is nothing, either, to hint at the tender mobility of the sensitive mouth, with its rose-leaf lips, nor—"

He came to a pause, and grew hot.

"Pshaw! I am making a fool of myself!" he said.

She had taken her eyes from the miniature, and had fixed them on his face. It was this that had brought him to that pause.

"It was not that I was thinking," she replied, in a stifled voice, bending again over the picture.

For full five minutes—perhaps more—she
down into the face of Alice without

speaking. Nor did he speak. Then she said, in tones of deep and tender mournfulness,

"Love and loyalty, and innocence and peace. No passion, but love, the best kind of love, the most lasting, the highest, the holiest, the happiest, seems to me to speak out of the face of your Alice."

To herself, with a pang, she added,

"What a wife for our son—for Julian! What a daughter for us!"

But for Julian, so young, so beautiful, so gifted, life must have many chances; must hide for him some other Alice, some Alice who would love him as this Alice loved his father. From Julian, who was absolutely free from any suspicion that he was, or could be, any thing to Alice, except as her "Lonel's" friend, Mrs. Winter had, of course, got her notion of Alice's feeling toward Julian.

During those minutes in which she had looked down into Alice's eyes, feeling as if in them she were reading the happy future of the man beside her, the man whose past she herself had spoiled, Sibyl had again grown wonderfully quiet. The hand with which she held the miniature to him, as she said, "Take back your Alice; she is worthy of all precious keeping," hardly trembled, and she looked full into his face, while over her own was a calm, white light of love. Not so much on her guard, because feeling more her own mistress, she had unheeding turned so that the brilliant afternoon light slanted right across her face, and filled the golden-hued darkness of her eyes.

Now, suddenly, the agitation from which she was free seemed to transfer itself to Colonel Dacre. Those eyes—large, limpid, loving, luminous, slightly prominent, but shaded by very long and dark lashes, eyes to dare more than they could endure, to challenge, and to shrink from the consequences of the challenge—those eyes powerfully smote Colonel Dacre. A sudden sense of strange, confused identity came over him; he seemed to be set back into some former life; an atmosphere of long ago was round him; it was as if he were remembering, so vividly as to live over again, past experiences. The things close round him seemed shows and shadows as he looked, receding and growing fainter. Had he fallen suddenly asleep? Was he dreaming a painful dream?

She saw a great change come over his face. He did not seem to see the miniature in her outstretched hand. It fell, and falling on the skirt of Sibyl's dress, it made no noise. Frowning perplexedly, he lifted his hand, and rubbed his forehead and his eyes. He shook his head, as if to try and shake off some tiresome insect buzzing about his brain.

"You are not well," cried Sibyl. "Sit down—oh! pray sit down!" And she herself sprang up (though a few moments before she would not have believed that she could stand or move). In doing so her light foot was lightly set, without her knowledge, upon the miniature.

She pushed a chair close to him, laying her hand on his arm, on his shoulder. He sank into the chair. It was all a dream. She bent over him—so close that he was conscious of her breath upon his cheek, and of the delicate, indefinite perfume hanging about her; and these things greatly helped to confuse past and present, dream-land and reality. It seemed to him to need a desperate, almost convulsive struggle, to enable him to remain conscious of who, and what, and where he was.

Sibyl opened a window. The fresh air from the sea blew in upon him and revived him. He lifted his head, which had been drooping forward helplessly, and looked up into the face bending above him. In his eyes was something that pierced to her heart—a pathos, a consciousness of having sustained a blow, a dumb sort of uncomprehended suffering.

"I don't know what it was," he said, slowly, and rather uncertainly. "Some curious kind of shock, seeming more mental than physical. A warning, perhaps, that I am no longer young, and must be more careful. I have had a good deal of fatigue and harass lately. I was never a very good traveler. A slight sunstroke which I had in India— No need to trouble you with my troubles, however," he added, with his grave, sweet smile. "I shall call on my friend Dr. Stanhaus on my own account. Will you allow me to send him to you?"

"You had a sunstroke in India?"

"It was called so. I rather believe the illness to have been caused by the shock of horror to which I alluded just now."

She moved away from him to the window. If he had said "grief" instead of "horror" the whole world might have changed for her. As it was, shut out from the luxurious room by the rich window-hangings, she sank on a settee, looked out over the blue waters of the harbor, stirred by the wind, flashing in the sun, bristling with many-masted ships, and found nothing to desire from life, but only death.

A slight exclamation from Colonel Dacre roused her, and she moved back to his side.

"Was it your foot or mine?" she asked, as she saw him pick up the golden miniature case, and saw that it was slightly bruised.

"Yours would have been too light to do any damage."

"But yours would have done more damage."

"Anyway, it is only the case, and not the picture, that is at all damaged," he concluded, and replaced it in its velvet cover, and then in his breast-pocket.

"And now," he said, holding out his hand, "I will intrude no longer. Just one last request. To appease Julian, give me an address to which he can write, with the hope that his letters will reach you."

After some moments of meditation, she wrote an address.

"It is not mine," she said, "but that of an old woman who has been a friend to me."

He thanked her, took and folded the paper,

and placed it in his pocket-book, then again held out his hand. She put hers into it. Detaining her hand in his, he asked,

"And Julian? What in the way of direct message shall I say for you to Julian?"

"Nothing—every thing and nothing."

Looking up into his face, she tried to smile. But oh! the power of that touch of his—of those eyes of his! She broke down, utterly broke down, threw herself against Colonel Dacre, in terrible abandonment of grief—as he thought—because, in the mother's agony at what seemed like a fresh and final parting from her son, there was no strength in her to stand alone. He put a supporting arm round her. Her convulsed face buried itself in his breast. She kissed, she even clenched between her teeth, the cloth of his coat.

And then, presently, holding herself a moment still, to realize the terrible bliss of being where she was, "Oh! to die now!" she cried within herself. After that, mistrusting her own power to keep from letting fly the one word that would suffice to kill every hope of happiness for the man whose arm was round her—the word "husband!"—she freed herself from his support, and rushed to the door of the inner room.

Having gained it, grasping the curtain in her hand she turned to look at him once more, and said,

"Think of me as mad. It is impossible you should understand. I am an unhappy woman—unhappy beyond all help or cure—and through my own blame. May God's best blessings be on your head, for Julian's sake!"

Then she let the curtain fall behind her, and he heard a door latched and locked between them.

CHAPTER VI.

DREAMING.

"The very stones of the hot street

Cried out the name I would not hear,

And tried to leaden-weight my feet

From flying 'fore that nameless fear."

COLONEL DACRE stood bewildered, almost stunned. The hot sun was streaming into the room from between the orange-trees upon the balcony, and the perfumed wind stirred the curtains. Tumultuous noises of gay and active life came up from the street. Was it all a fantastic dream? He tried to rouse himself. He put his hand on his coat where her face had been. It was wet with her tears. One word, a name—the name of a woman whose tears had been shed on his breast, and who had had the right to shed them there, many, many long years ago—came from between his lips. That sound to some extent roused him.

"Am I drunk, or dreaming, or going mad?" he said aloud and angrily, in self-anger.

He listened for any stir or sound in the next room; none reached him. He looked round

the room in which he was standing, almost as if looking for his lost sanity; then he left it, after once again taking up his hat. He passed down the stairs and out into the street, always expecting either to wake from this bewildering dream, or to be pulled back more entirely into it. The very vividness of light and of noisy life about him seemed to make every thing the more unreal; he staggered in his walk.

Presently he paused and leaned against the wall. The spot where he paused, though he did not know this, was immediately under the balcony running outside Sibyl's windows. He paused some time—long enough to make people look curiously at him; then he shook his head, shook himself, and went on; only for a few steps, then he looked back, turned back, retraced those few steps, paused again at the same place. It was as if, while he willed to go on, some mysterious influence pulled him back.

Colonel Dacre came to the conclusion that he was threatened with an attack of some strange brain malady. It must be remembered that during five-and-twenty years he had never once been visited by the faintest doubt of his wife's

death; in fact, her death had been proved to him in every way short of his having seen her corpse. He called a cab, drove first to the post-office, and then, having posted his letters, to the house of his medical friend. His friend, Dr. Stanhaus, pronounced him to be suffering from strong nervous disturbance; told him he ought to take care of himself—that a man of his age, who had lived a good deal in India, and had had, however slight, a sunstroke, had no business to knock himself about, and travel night and day. Dr. Stanhaus prescribed for him, advised him as to his mode of life, and kept him to dinner.

It was quite late when Colonel Dacre returned to the hotel. His strange, indefinite anxieties and agitations had quieted down. Going to the bureau to give some instructions as to the time he wished to be called in the morning, he asked, in as careless a voice as he could assume, a question about the lady who occupied part of the large apartment on the first floor, which had been retained for Sir Everard Hope Kennedy. He was told that she had started that evening by packet for Palermo. This information troubled him—with pity.

BOOK VIII.—SIBYL.

CHAPTER I.

SELF-CONFLICT.

"Breath freezes on my lips to moan;
As one alone, once not alone,
I sit and knock at Nature's door,
Heart-bare, heart-hungry, very poor."

SIBYL had in her life, in one way and another, suffered a good deal; but the intricate misery of subtle self-torture which she now, after that meeting with her husband, experienced, made her feel as if till now she had never known what it was to suffer. Ah! the difference between the long, dull length of passive renunciation of former years, and such renunciation as she must now exact from herself, if she exacted any!

Her first step it had been simply impossible, in the heat of passion and the smart of sore wounds, not to take. When temptation to undo what had been then done visited her, in the years that had followed, such temptation had been comparatively easy to set aside. But now! Now that husband and son were familiar-featured, sweet-bodied, tangible realities; hands she had recently clasped, and whose warmth she still felt tingle in her own; eyes which had lately looked lovingly into hers; lips that had for her, so short a while ago, had kind words—kind smiles. Oh, the difference!

Sibyl's mind was as a tumultuous chaos, thronged by a crowd of incongruous phantoms. She might pray to be delivered from temptation, but there were moments when she doubted whether, from what she meant by temptation, she ought to seek deliverance; when the question would arise, which was the temptation from which she needed to pray for deliverance? Her first definite resolution was to fly. It was not within the same walls, under the same roof with her husband, that she could trust herself to know or to judge of any thing. A sudden, destructive frenzy might seize her, and it needed only one word from her to him to ruin all his life.

Among the many phantom-voices speaking in her, one kept crying, "The truth, the truth, nothing is good but the truth. By withholding the truth, you give up to dishonor those to whom honor is beyond all things dear." Another voice would suggest to her that, in this "chance" which had thrown husband and son in her way, before it was too late, she ought to recognize the merciful providence of God.

Yet another voice would remind her of Julian's love for Alice, who would surely learn to love Julian when she was, in such a manner, freed from her allegiance to his father. These voices she reckoned as those of the tempter; and to these voices how could she dare listen while they spoke in unison with the passionate personal craving for happiness which was setting her whole being in a tumult. Happiness to her! The vain delusion! It was in her power, no doubt, to destroy the happiness of others, but what power was hers to secure happiness even for herself? If she set aside the thought of happiness, and considered duty and right-doing, was her way any clearer? Hardly; it seemed too late, a mockery now, that she should set up for duty and right-doing. She seemed forced, too, to recognize that there was not even left her the merit, the cold comfort, of self-sacrificing renunciation. What was hers of what she cared for that she could renounce? It was not the mere name of wife and mother that she craved, but the realities of beloved wifehood and motherhood; and these would crumble in her grasp. Was she now, with full knowledge, to repeat the ignorant fault of her youth, at the memory of which the blush of youth rose richly to her clear cheeks, and her eyes filled with the stinging tears of shame? He had never loved her, not in the first bloom of her impassioned beauty; he had pitied her, protected her, been kind to her, according to his gentle nature, but he had never loved her. How should he love her now, now when she would appear to him a fiend, a fury, at best an adverse fate; while then she was only a too-passionately loving girl?

No, there was nothing for her to renounce, for there was nothing worth having that could be hers.

As to truth, what could she and truth have to do with each other? Her very life had been a lie for five-and-twenty years. Though she had lived so purely that not even by one thought had she ever wronged her wifehood, though she had striven to live nobly and usefully, still her very life had been a lie. How could she now trust to the rectitude of any impulse urging her to speak truth which must give her at least the outward semblance (and how could she tell but that some mad hope yet lingered that it might give her more?) of that for which she longed with every fibre of her being, every pulse of her heart? As to

wrong that might be done by others through her silence, she trusted that God would not visit as sin such innocent wrong-doing.

All this, and much more, passed through Mrs. Dacre's mind as she lay on her bed. When she had first thrown herself there, after tearing herself from her husband, in what had felt like the final agony of heart-break, she had, for some while, known nothing, thought nothing.

It seems sometimes as if our ignorant blundering, our self-willed conceits, or our sinful, selfish passionatenesses, get our lives into such a perplexed tangle that it needs more than mortal wisdom, more than mortal courage, to seize the right right, the true truth, to cling to them, and to act upon them, trusting all consequences to God, while knowing, as far as we can know any thing, that those consequences will be the wrecked lives of others innocent of wrong. To those among us who have not more than mortal wisdom, not more than mortal courage, and whose motives are apt to be complicated by subtle, unconscious self-delusions, may it not be safer to persevere in the course that presses upon our own brows the deserved crown of thorns, rather than to change our course, straining to grasp higher and more absolute right, which may set the thorny crown upon guiltless brows?

It may be that it is possible to suffer our "hell" here, in being forced, by consideration for others, to continue in wrong-doing after our eyes are opened and our consciences active. And yet how much more keen and vivid a "hell" may we plunge into by acting on the suggestions of the late awakened conscience, and filling our mouths and our nostrils with the bitter dust of innocent ruin, while we ourselves stand, as the world thinks, in our right, and safe.

By-and-by, as she lay there, almost too exhausted with the conflict to think any longer, a most insidious form of flattering temptation appealed to her. She asked herself, could the man from whom she had just parted—a man of so gentle and chivalrous a nature that his arm had been as tender as it was strong, thrown round a suffering woman, because she was a woman, because she was suffering—could such a man keep his heart closed against that woman, when he recognized in her his wife, who had sinned, but who had also greatly suffered, and who was the mother of his son—of such a son as Julian? Here, at last, had she not firm ground under her feet? Might she not uplift her head and approach her husband, sure, with such a gift as Julian in her hand, of his welcome? Might she not, for her son's sake, hope to be lifted from her husband's feet, should she throw herself there, to be taken into the heaven of his arms, allowed to rest and to weep *upon his breast*? Might there not be in store *for her, even for her, happy sunset hours; days, weeks, months, even years, during which no*

in her, but the very tenderness of his

own noble nature, would make him increase in love for the loving, suffering woman, in whom he would cease to see the sinner, in intense recognition of the sufferer?

The gay sunshine, the perfumed wind, the hum and stir of life—things to which Mrs. Dacre was acutely sensitive—helped her to abandon herself to dreams of such fair, fancied possibilities. Closing her eyes, Sibyl imagined to herself what it would be to have her husband bending over her, to hear fond words from his lips, to feel a loving light in his look—in short, to know herself not only forgiven, but beloved. She was ready to swoon, to die, in the warm flood of bliss such imagination poured over her. From mere exhaustion she presently fell asleep, and slept till—when the sunset shimmer of the water was reflected on her wall—a knock at her door woke her.

The knock had to be twice repeated before she could collect herself. The room should have been peopled with husband, son, Alice, and that "Olivia" who was a stern and dread figure in this poor woman's fancy. It was empty—she was alone. She got off the bed to unlock the door, and felt bruised and broken, stiff and sore from head to foot.

One of the chamber-maids—a girl whom Sir Everard had paid handsomely to take what care she could of Mrs. Winter—was at the door, to ask how soon dinner should be served, and also, from the manager of the hotel, whether the lady was likely to wish to retain her apartments after the time for which Sir Everard had prepaid them.

"On the contrary," she answered, abruptly, "I shall leave Marseilles this evening."

And that very evening she watched a mellow moonrise from the deck of a steamer bound for Southern Italy, and rejoiced at the caressing freshness of the soft night-wind. She had decided on nothing, come to no conclusion. She was gaining time.

CHAPTER II.

A FLOAT.

"I, too, sat quiet, satisfied with death—
Sat silent: I could hear my own soul speak,
And had my friend; for Nature comes sometimes,
And says, 'I am ambassador for God.'"

SITTING on the deck again in the early sunshine, under a crystalline, clear sky; breathed on by a breath that seemed to blow from some enchanted land, from the very kingdom of morning; sailing through wafts of spicy perfume and across the silvery sound of bells; having slept that past night a sound, unbroken sleep, such as she had not had for weeks, Sibyl said,

"It is no use to think any longer, to try to decide any thing. I will not seek them. If it is God's will that we should meet again, they will seek me, and will find me."

So saying, folding her hands, she yielded herself up to a delicious lassitude, in which, just now, life, mere life, seemed fair and sweet and desirable; while of death she could only think as of a cold terror—an awful plunge into a dark mystery.

To how few of us (most of us being, alas! more sinners than saints) is the idea of death really welcome, except as a vague, distant prospect!

"An old man, vexed and wearied, said,
'I wish to God that I were dead!'
Death at his heels cried, 'Be it so.'
The old man answered, 'No, no, no!'"

And many of us would, in the same spirit, meet such answer to such prayer, desiring rather to cling to evils that we know "than fly to others that we know not of;" to take the chances of brighter days and sunnier, in this "sweet upper world," rather than launch ourselves upon the unknown.

To the Christian death certainly should wear a different aspect from that it bore for the old Greek; but, nevertheless, to whom much is given, of them will much be required; and who is there among us should feel sure that that infinite love and mercy of the Everlasting, revealed to us by our Lord, may not see fit to appoint for us in a future state (in order to purge us from the sinfulness of unreconciled repining at His will in this), a discipline before the knowledge of which our flesh would fail and our spirits blench? In Dante's hell he gives a place to the dark and bitter spirits which with this sweet upper world are discontent, for that very sin of discontent.

Possibly poor Sibyl was not so much resigned as merely soothed and cradled by the pleasant influences of place and time. Anyway, to sit quiet and calm in the sunshine—pleasant sights, pleasant sounds, pleasant scents about her—seemed to-day enough for this weary woman. Rightly or wrongly she had judged herself, and judged herself to be of such a nature as to make decisions useless, believing that the strain by which she might lift herself to heroic resolve—could she even see what resolve in her could be heroic—would be liable to a following reaction which might leave her groveling in the dust of mere selfish desires.

For the time there was a wonderful peace within her; but she herself would have pronounced it not to be that "peace past understanding" of a soul clinging in faith to the foot of the cross, and looking to the One unchangeable—to whom lie upon the cross looked also, to whom he cried—and feeling that, undismayed, it could see the mountains reel, the waves rage, the ends of the earth be shaken—not such peace, but rather the peace of the idiot basking in the sunshine, or the child smiling placidly from the milky haven of its mother's breast. But at least poor Sibyl felt harmless, innocent of thought to harm.

Two young English girls, who had come on board that morning, often looked at her. They spoke to each other about her, and wished to

speak to her, interested by her absorbed look and long hours of entire immobility.

"How very, very beautiful she must have been!" one said.

"To me she seems very beautiful now," the other answered.

"She looks so intensely sad, and she is quite alone; don't you think we ought to speak to her?" questioned the first speaker.

"I don't think she would like it. I think she wants to be left to her own thoughts. I should think she feels least alone when she is left alone."

But in the course of the day one of these girls found the chance of offering Sibyl some kind attention. She felt enriched and rewarded by the way it was met. Poor Sibyl had thought, as she looked into a very pretty, pure, and innocent fair face, "Is Alice like that? How I would love such a daughter!" Then, as only in Julian's wife could she ever have a daughter, her thoughts turned in a direction dangerous to that brief peace.

The April moon was full that night. As the crimson sun set, she clomb, of the softest rose-color, out of the sea, changing from rose to gold, from gold to silver, as she climbed the sky, striking olive-clothed slopes, from which stood forth quaint square convent towers, and giving the beauty of things seen in a dream to the lovely line of distant mountains. There was a perfect witchery about the scene and time. The air was dry and balmy, and yet with the most invigorating, pure freshness.

The long hours of absolute repose, such as she had not known for years, had done their work, of good or evil, for Sibyl. Again began the passionate conflict as of two souls in one breast—her short peace was indeed gone! As she paced the deck, the warm and perfumed night-wind seemed to wake in her ever wider, wilder, keener longing for love—for his love—her husband's love! She felt dangerously young and full of life. As she walked, between herself and every thing she looked on was—not now her son's beautiful young face, with its almost girl-like downy delicacy of texture, but her husband's face, bronzed and careworn, fixing her with a long, grave gaze, full of question.

She abandoned herself to her own impassioned realization of things that might be. The smouldering fires of her youth seemed all to rekindle; her long-suppressed life leaped into vivid flame; to the tips of her fingers, to the ends of her hair, she seemed conscious of the electric tingling of renewed vitality.

"He is mine, mine only, only mine!" was the cry of her heart. "How could I let him go? Why did I not clutch and claim him? He would have been kind, he would have been pitiful, ah! he would even have been tender—out of this might not love have come? He is mine, mine, mine!"

But soon her own heart, mocking itself, reminded her,

"He was never fairly yours. What you stole long ago, you long ago threw away!"

But the obstinate heart returned to its first song—"He is mine, mine only, only mine!" Her cheeks burned and her eyes blazed.

Her steps quickened, and her movements grew more and more impetuous.

It was not till, for very weariness, she could stand no longer—and this was not till the greater part of that wonderful night was gone—that she ceased her walking to and fro.

Then she would not go down to the cabin as she had done the previous night, but sat down on deck, laid her shrouded head on the ship's side, and fell asleep. She dreamed; at first such dreams as would have made her, had she had the power of choice, choose to dream forever! In these dreams her cheek was pillowed, not on her own hand, as in reality, but on her husband's; the gentle sounds of wind and water were the sounds of her husband's voice speaking pity, forgiveness, love!

But, by-and-by, the nature of these dreams changed; in these changed dreams she threw herself on her husband's breast, and it was iron-hard and cold, and the arms that closed round her crushed her against this iron breast in a grip of hate and death. The physical pain of a hard pillow and an uneasy attitude, after a short time, roused her. To what sort of dawn?

If the sun should shine again, the wind be soft again, sky and sea be sapphire-blue again, life might again, still, for that day, seem sweet and fair and desirable. But should the *bise* blow, or the mistral, and the world be chill and shrouded in grim gloom, how then would the thought of such unloved existence, as she would then feel sure she must always lead, be endurable?

CHAPTER III.

WHY HE MARRIED HER.

"The House of Life is a narrow house,
And blundering, bat-eyed mortals
May stir as softly as stirs a mouse,
And yet hit against its portals!"

SOMETHING with which this story has nothing to do had shut the heart of Sibyl's mother against her only child: the girl had never known her father; he had died just before she was born.

The mother, Mrs. Summers, a very beautiful woman, kept what was, in fact, though she would have been scandalized to hear it called so, a boarding-house, at one of the most celebrated health-stations on the Himalayas. During her husband's life she had occupied a much higher position, but he had died suddenly, leaving his affairs involved, and his widow, just about to become a mother for the first time, unprovided for.

Sibyl was a passionate-natured child, and almost from birth showed herself ungovernable—such influences as were brought to bear

upon her. As she grew up, she neither ceased to resent the cold harshness she experienced, nor to yearn for the love and tenderness withheld.

There was one thing only regarding Sibyl in which her mother took any interest—her education. Wishing to be rid of the girl, not believing she was likely to make any good early marriage, Mrs. Summers destined her to be a governess, and spared neither cost nor pains upon her instruction.

Sibyl, at fifteen, was, in some ways, as mature as an English home-educated girl would have been at twenty. And yet, in other ways, she was the merest child. It was when she was just fifteen that a passionate first-love sprang to life within her for Walter Dacre (then about the age of her Julian when she first saw him as a man), who was for some months boarding in her mother's house, to recover from the effects of a severe attack of fever.

Walter Dacre was the first person, with the exception of an old native woman, her nurse, who had ever shown Sibyl much kindness. He was not only kind, but courteous, treating her "like a lady." His kindness, had she known it, was only such as one of his nature instinctively showed to gentle, timid, beautiful things. The girl was very beautiful, and toward him, from the first time he looked at her and spoke to her, gentle and timid. His kindness to her went dangerously deep; the love it awakened had such force, depth, concentration, that it was indeed her very life. It seemed as if all the love with which she should have loved father, mother, brother, sister, and friend ran into and overflowed this one channel.

No doubt young Walter Dacre grew interested in the graceful and lovely creature whose whole aspect would change, soften, and brighten at his approach. He often left the smoking-room, neither the physical nor the moral atmosphere of which was at any time very congenial to him, for the music-room and Sibyl.

He praised and criticised her singing and her playing, and showed that he loved to listen to them. He lent her books which he thought likely to cultivate her taste, and he talked to her "instructively" about their contents. Once or twice he even went so far as to give her hints about her manners and conduct to her mother and to other people. He could not fail to be touched by the docile humility and observance with which she received all he said.

Of course the post of guide, philosopher, and friend was a dangerous post for so young a man to assume toward a beautiful young girl; but in this instance there was no fair division of danger. It was all to the poor girl, who, passionate and impulsive, with a woman's heart, and one overcharged with love, beating in a childish breast, had no more power of self-restraint, no more wisdom or experience of the world, than a child.

It is true that, now and then, some glance of Captain Dacre's eyes, which could not help be-

ing dark and fiery, might have told Sibyl that he acknowledged and did homage to her beauty. But he was a young fellow of high aims, lofty ambitions, always pretty much preoccupied, whose fancy could not "lightly turn to thoughts of love;" one who would take love, as all things else, seriously.

When he loved, he would wish to love worshipfully some being very different from this girl whom he sometimes censured, sometimes praised, always pitied, and was always gently kind to.

Walter Dacre at this time was very much of an idealist, an enthusiast; the fire of those dark eyes, which other, older and more experienced women than Sibyl had felt to be so dear and so dangerous, was not fed by any thing the world calls passion.

In his regiment he had been nicknamed Sir Percival, the Maiden Knight; and the purity of his life and conduct, reproaching many of those with whom he associated, must have made him disliked, had it not been for the generous warmth and kindness of his social and sympathetic nature, his wise, wide tolerance, his marvelous freedom from any form of "priggishness," and the winning charm of his gracious manner.

Being very young himself, he thought of the fifteen-year-old Sibyl as so mere a child that it never occurred to him to dread danger to her from their intercourse; at all events, not till the last few days of his stay in the hills; then, certainly, the troubled impulsiveness of her behavior, and the intensity of feeling she showed in regard to his departure, alarmed him.

When the day and the hour which had been fixed for his start on his return to his regiment came, it greatly disturbed him to find that Sibyl was missing. He felt forced to suspect that not too little but too much feeling made her shun any definite leave-taking. As her old nurse, also missing, was no doubt with her, he felt no anxiety about her safety.

He left a kind letter for Sibyl, and a large parcel of books; and the fact of having said no farewell word to her made him think of her on his journey much oftener than he would probably otherwise have done.

As he sat in his tent at evening, on his first halt, suddenly, as if by magic, Sibyl was at his feet, clasping his knees, kissing his hands, pouring out an incoherent torrent of entreaty for forgiveness, of determination to die if he sent her from him, of love, of sorrow, of despair! And it was impossible he could believe this to be a mere childish freak. The fire in her wonderful eyes, the tragic passion in her words, the utter abandonment to one idea expressed by her every attitude and gesture, forbade any such interpretation of her conduct.

The poor young fellow at first seemed turned to stone, stunned to silence. At a glance he took in and was appalled by the consequences of the step the girl had taken, a step which affected and compromised both her hon-

or and his. He would not be able even to wish that he should be held blameless, as this would be to throw such killing blame on her.

"Sibyl, Sibyl, what have you done?" came from him, more as a groan than as a question.

The girl cowered and shivered, and sank at his feet, covering her face with her hands. That tone, and the grave, sad look of reproach and consternation on his face, cut her to the heart. She did not speak. He was trying to think of some possible way of returning her secretly to her mother. When he believed he saw how this could be effected he began to talk to her, in a tone of most earnestly tender remonstrance, of the folly and the wickedness of what she had done, of the danger to her, the difficulty to him, of the impossibility that she could remain one hour where she was.

On that she looked up and answered him, quite quietly, that she would go; that if she might not stay with him, to be to him as a servant, as a dog, any thing, so that she might stay with him, she would go, but not home to her mother. She would do any possible thing he asked her to do, but that was not possible. It was not possible to leave him and to live. For her there was one only choice between love and death.

He spoke to her again in the same tone, entreating her to be calm, to be wise, to be good, to remember that she was no longer a child, but a woman; to call up her woman's pride to help her to second him in protecting her honor.

"Honor!" she then said, lifting those glorious eyes of hers to him. "There can be no honor for me so great as to live with you—to be your servant! I care for nothing and for no one but you in the whole world! What else in the whole world have I that I could care for?"

He tried what his anger would do, if he could scold her into obedience, as he might have scolded a child; but in no way could he move her from her determination to die if he sent her from him.

When, by-and-by, she fancied he might be relenting, she pleaded,

"I will be no trouble—I will do no harm. You need take no more notice of me than if I were a dog. I only want to stay with you."

He endeavored to appeal to her generosity—to try to make her understand what she imposed on him, saying,

"I can only keep you with me by making you my wife. I do not want to marry. I do not want to have a wife—not yet—not for years to come."

"I don't want to be your wife. I am not fit to be your wife. I only ask to stay with you."

"And you ask," he replied, in a cold displeased voice, "what it is simply impossible for me to grant."

"You have no pity, then," she said, in a heart-broken tone.

"It is because I have pity, you poor child!"

"No pity, no love—no hope, no life!" Saying that, she got up from the ground at his feet, stood looking at him, with such wistful, anguished entreaty in her great forlorn and most beautiful eyes, that his heart stirred within him.

"Not only pity," he said, "but love. I will love you as your friend always, if you will be good now, and do as I ask you now."

"If you knew how it feels here, you would know that it is not possible," she answered him, with her hand on her heart.

His soul was shaken with pity. What possible future lay before this girl? So beautiful, so passionate, so ignorant? A frown of pain contracted his smooth young brow. Sibyl was quick to see it.

"I trouble you," she said, in quite a new manner. "Perhaps there are things I don't understand to trouble you. Forgive me—I did not know." She stooped and kissed his hand; then she slipped softly away.

Absorbed in thought, he did not at first miss her. She paused a moment in the midnight moonlight outside the tent door; then she made her swift way down to the river-side.

"To die must be so easy!" she thought as she looked into the water. "And if it is wicked, I think God will forgive me." She knelt a few moments, and then—

Strong arms were round her, holding her back as she would have sprung in. She struggled in these arms. Some vague consciousness had wakened in her that she had wronged him by what she had done—that, for his sake, it would be better she should die.

Walter Dacre was curiously little influenced in what he did by the girl's beauty. As a true woman of the noblest type is only a loving woman (with the one love "of men and women when they love the best") for one man, so to Walter Dacre the beauty of women was nothing, save in the same way as the beauty of all other beautiful things, till he should meet the one woman who was to be the lady of his love and of his life. Even at the moment when he held the soft, tender form within his restraining arms, he recognized in a flash that probably, as far as human wisdom could decide, as far as this life only was concerned, it might be better for him to have let her die then and there. But Walter Dacre did not let any such thought influence him; he was not accustomed to set human wisdom in competition with divine law, or to separate this life from another. Partly by persuasion, partly by force, he got Sibyl back to his tent, and laid her on the couch which had been prepared for himself. Worn out with varying emotion, and satisfied now that he did not mean to send her away, the poor child almost immediately fell asleep.

Till morning Walter Dacre paced to and fro outside his tent. He had enough to think about. As a less pure-minded man might have failed to do, he recognized the utter innocence of the girl. Conscious of nothing but

the imperative force of her love, she had followed him as a child might have followed its mother. Perhaps the sacrifices he felt called upon to make for her loomed all the larger to him for their vagueness. It was no definite sacrifice of this thing and of that, but sacrifice of all sort of delicious and wonderful possibilities.

His heart was very sad and very heavy when, at dawn, he stood beside the sleeping Sibyl, and looked down on her, with his mind made up as to what he would do; but his heavy sadness could not but be touched to tenderness as he gazed. Sibyl's face, in repose, in the smoothed-out helplessness of sleep, seemed to him far more lovely than he had ever seen it. It seemed to him, too, that in that loveliness there was a promise of nobility. When the wonderful lamps of eyes were shaded there was nothing to distract the attention from the high-bred-looking delicacy of the features. Sleep had brought back to the cheeks on which the full dark lashes rested their rich, soft bloom.

"God help me to be good to you, you poor little, beautiful, wild thing!" young Walter Dacre said. "Surely, as there is no other woman I love, I can love you who are so lovely."

Under the influence of his gaze, the girl woke. She looked up at him, first in entire bewilderment; then, as the dim consciousness of wrong, which had awakened the night before, returned upon her, she flushed crimson, and hid her face with her slender hands. He put his hand upon her head, and spoke to her very quietly and very kindly.

"Sibyl, since you are so good as to love me so much, I want you to be my wife," he said.

By those words his fate was settled.

That day he took Sibyl to the care of a friend of his—a noble old lady, in whom he had full confidence. Then he went back, and had an interview with the girl's mother, to whom he told the simple truth.

After that night he felt years older.

CHAPTER IV.

ADRIET.

"Our rash faults
Make trivial price of serious things we have,
Not knowing them until we know their grave."

For Sibyl's sake Captain Dacre effected an exchange into a regiment stationed at a distance, and then he married her.

Sibyl being so young, and his confidence in her safety where he had placed her, and in the good influences that would be brought to bear upon her, absolute, he would not have hurried on the marriage, but that his old friend wrote him word that Sibyl pined and wasted, was very gentle, and perfectly docile, but so profoundly sad that she feared she might fall into seriously weak health.

When Captain Dacre brought home his beautiful young wife, he was accounted a very fortunate

nate fellow. Her devotion to him was visible to all eyes. Happiness gave dignity and repose, the charms that had been wanting, to Sibyl's manner. When she had been only a few weeks married, she was more, instead of less, womanly than her years. She had always been a graceful creature, and her bearing now had about it a noble kind of modest pride, the secret of which was in her consciousness, "I am his wife, and he loves me!" A fact which Sibyl felt should raise her above other women.

It was certainly true that young Walter Dacre did love his wife. He loved her more and better than he would have thought possible. Not in the fashion of his dreams of the love to be given to his best-beloved, but still there could be no doubt that he loved her.

Loving and being loved, and the companionship of a sweet and high-toned mind such as her husband's, developed the folded buds of all that was most admirable in the girl's nature, with a miraculous seeming rapidity. And then, before the slightest cloud had come over their first happiness, when they had been only a few months together, Captain Dacre was suddenly called into action. The parting between him and Sibyl was such as would be natural between a fondly-loving young husband and wife. To his love was added so much feeling of responsibility, so much compassion, so much regret that he had not more carefully prepared for such an emergency, that he was intensely affected. As to the prudence of Sibyl's conduct in his absence he had no fears.

In proportion to the boundlessly imprudent recklessness of self-abandonment she had shown before her marriage, had since been her instinctive propriety of conduct, her guileless shrinking from guile. A woman such as Sibyl now was makes men who approach her feel that for her there is but one man in the world—that man her husband. And this, with no self-complacent prudery, no parade of virtue, nothing inconsistent with courteous grace.

"A fellow might as well try to get up a flirtation with a statue as with Mrs. Captain Dacre," said one of Captain Dacre's comrades.

"Any letters that come for me, Sibyl, after I am gone, my wife will, of course, feel at liberty to open and to read."

This was one of the things he said to her in the bitter-sweet hour of farewell, seeking about in his mind for any proofs he could give her of his trust. For he knew that, though she showed a nobly proud face as his wife to the world, nevertheless her humility was profound; and he knew that, but for the happy belief that he loved her now, the shame of remembering in what manner she had thrust herself upon him might have had almost force enough to kill her.

He had wished to extract a promise from her that "if any thing happened" to him—which meant of course if he were killed in action—she would go at once to England, to his sister. But he had not dared to speak these words, to raise the images they would have suggested.

Well! they parted. As best she could, trying to be brave because he would wish her to be brave, she lived through the first bitter days of separation. And then there fell upon her, from a quarter whence the chance even of a blow had not occurred to her husband, a blow that seemed annihilating. None of the dangers his love had feared and prefigured for her, but a danger he had never contemplated, killed her, as he thought.

A letter came from Olivia, a delayed, much-traveled letter (several letters had been received from her of later date than this one), when Captain Dacre had been gone about ten days.

Sibyl loved to read Olivia's letters, loved to get glimpses of England, and of the home where her husband had grown up, and to which he would some day take her. Till she read this letter she had ventured to love Olivia as Walter's brave, beautiful, high-spirited, intensely-loving, and much-beloved sister. It chanced that Sibyl was hardly an hour alone that day till evening. The wives of her husband's brother-officers kept looking in "to console her." Till evening she kept Olivia's letter in her bosom (for the sake of her husband's name upon it) unread.

At evening she read it as she could. Sometimes such fierce fires of shame burned before her eyes that she could not see, but she read it all, every word. It was a passionate, tempestuous, eloquent, ill-considered letter, written with one idea—to speak strongly enough to hinder Walter from the sacrifice of his whole life, which, it seemed to the writer, he was contemplating.

Sibyl was mad by the time she had finished reading. She did not pause to think, to reason; she only felt, she was stung to the very core. The letter had been written but with one idea, and Sibyl, when she read it, had but one; she must fly, she must die, must rid him of the intolerable burden she had laid upon him, and herself of the consciousness of what she had done.

For one moment a healing, cooling breath breathed upon her, as she thought, "but surely he loves me now!" Only for a moment, then her cheeks burned with hotter and hotter scarlet, her poor brain with fiercer and fiercer fire. There was room but for that one passion—of strong, hot, intolerable shame. The girl's humility made her unquestioningly accept all that was said of her, while her love and her pride made it sting her to the quick. She folded Olivia's letter, and inclosed it to her husband, with these words:

"I have read it. It is cruelly said, but it is all true. If only I had known! But now I can do something. I will die; you will be free. I don't think God will be very angry with me. He knows how I love you, and that I do it for your sake. When your sister knows, will she forgive me? Don't be sorry about it. Indeed I couldn't bear to live. God bless you! He will, you are so good, so good!"

She left the letter lying where it was.

posted. It was now dark. She stole out of the happy home she was never to re-enter. She had thrown a black shawl over her light dress. She kept among the dark-hued, scented bushes, and, by-and-by, had got down to the river. The water looked black and dreadful. Hideous, horrible things might be lying in ambush. She would wait for the light before throwing herself in.

She stepped into a boat kept there for the use of the house; she unfastened its chain. The deed was done. She was adrift. Her shawl had been caught by the bushes, and had remained behind upon them. That shawl, the boat missing, and afterward found where and how it was found, seemed to leave no doubt of her fate; beyond the point where the boat was found no search was ever made.

The deed was done. She was helplessly drifting away, always farther away, from home. By-and-by a storm that had been all day impending broke overhead. The boat tossed formidably on the waves made by the wind; the rain poured down and drenched her to the skin. How terrible, how miserable it was to be there alone, in the dark night and on the dark water!

When the storm had passed, she was trembling with fear and with cold. The fever-fire of madness was quenched, but the crushing sense of intolerable shame remained; some of the phrases of Olivia's letter were burned into her memory.

And now, quite suddenly, she remembered, and somehow now first understood, something her old nurse had whispered to her about herself only that morning. Remembering this, a great awe fell upon her—a dread sense of the crime of what she had intended when she fled from home. The mother-instinct woke in her, passionate as were all her instincts. She no longer desired death but life, life for the sake of that hidden life in life within her, which, if she killed herself, would make of her a murderess!

Crouching in the bottom of the boat, always drifting her away, she tried to reach Heaven with agonized supplication. By-and-by she slept. She was awakened by a shock, and found herself struggling in the water close to the bank, half suffocated with weeds, and her feet able to get no hold in the slimy ooze. Thank God it was morning! At last, by the help of the upturned boat, which a snag had caught and capsized, and which was stranded, she succeeded in getting her feet on firm land.

As she tried to thank God for her life, she knew that yet more horrible death might lie in wait for her in the near jungle or in the bottom of the river. The sun rose. The river ran by like a river of blood; how soon her blood might for a moment tinge it! The loneliness was awful, in the great glory of the scene. As she sat there, the river of hidden deaths at her feet, the jungle of hidden deaths behind her, *her wish for life intensified*—not for the old life, but for a new. She had died for her husband. That was over—done. But if she

might live for her child—sitting there, wet through, covered with slimy mud, watching the blood-red sun lift itself higher and higher, she fell to dreaming delirious sort of fancies about the sweetness, the preciousness of living for her child! It seemed to her that her prayers were answered, and that her fair fancies were to be fulfilled, when the first boat that came down the river held only an old native woman and her market-baskets. She showed herself, and pointed to her upturned, stranded boat. The woman came as near as she could. And by-and-by, though she had only with infinite difficulty managed to get in, Sibyl was lying, wrapped in some of the old woman's spare draperies (which it had cost her a shudder of her dainty and delicate flesh to put on), in the bottom of the boat.

Sibyl had no difficulty in making the old woman understand all she cared to tell her. She promised her the gold ornaments she happened to be wearing, if she would take her on and on till night-fall, shelter her that night, and never tell any one what her cargo had been.

It was not the hot season, and the sky, soon after the fiery sunrise, was overcast. The woman gave Sibyl bread and fruit to eat, and she lay all day hidden, dreaming forward in her new prospects, but now in a dull, dead sort of way.

The old woman was better than her word; she not only hid Sibyl in a place of safety that night, but with the earliest morning—she was by this time far too ill to walk—set her on a mule, wrapped in garments that covered her from head to foot, and took her a day's journey inland to people of whom she spoke as "the good people."

By the time this journey was over Sibyl had been no longer conscious of any thing. Before she had left the boat she had taken off her ornaments and given them to the old woman. Her wedding-ring she took off and put into her bosom, from whence it fell, unnoticed by those who undressed her, and rolled away, to be found many days after by Sibyl herself.

Sibyl had a long illness—fever, delirium, and racking pain.

When she recovered she begged to stay with "the good people" as their servant. They said that she should stay with them, though not as their servant, at least till her child should be born, and she be well again. By the time this had happened they loved her.

They had asked her few questions. They were people who gave their existence to works of benevolence. Sibyl's youth, her beauty and her refinement, had led them to conclude that she had been innocently betrayed into, and had fled from, a life of sin. That she was a wife who had fled from her husband was not a thought likely to present itself. They did not try to draw her secrets from her, but waited till it should please her to relieve her heart of them. When the first few weeks, during which she

was unconscious of any thing but unquestioning mother-joy, were past, poor Sibyl began to brood over her boy's future.

Very slowly she felt forced to recognize that God does not let us pick and choose among our duties, rejecting some, retaining others. She had refused to remain a wife, therefore how could she dare to remain a mother to such a boy as her husband's son must prove? Already she believed she could read on the baby-brow that he would grow to such a man as his father; a man to whom shame would be worse than a thousand deaths. The pity that had been given to her, to her supposed shame, her own real shame seeming to her far greater, had not hurt her, for herself, at all; but it would lie, she knew, like a blight on her boy's life.

She came to see that she must give up her child. In bringing herself to be sure of this, she went through a slow agony of martyrdom, to which nothing she had yet suffered seemed any thing. She must give up her child! to the adoption of these good people, who had lost their own one only child just before she was brought to them.

And what had to be done must, she felt, be done quickly, or it could not be done at all; every day, every hour, the clutch of those baby-fingers on her heart-strings growing tighter. Her friends, who had correspondents all the world over, procured for her a safe home, and a safe escort to it, in a great educational establishment in Germany. From here she wrote to her friends what, if she had said it to them, they would have felt justified in making her explain; she wrote:

"Let my boy grow up knowing that his father was a noble man, and his mother not a sinner in the way you think."

But it was not with them that her boy grew up. During a heavy visitation of cholera, these good people, having sent the little Julian into a safe refuge, turned their house into a hospital, themselves into hospital nurses. They saved many lives, and lost their own.

Before embarking on the adventure, they had bequeathed Julian, and for his benefit any property they might die possessed of, to Captain Julian Farquhar, their relative, after whom they had named him.

BOOK IX.—HOW IT ENDED.

CHAPTER I.

SEHNSUCHT.

"Lass mein Aug' den Abschied sagen,
Den mein Mund nicht nehmen kann!
Schwer, wie schwer ist er zu tragen!
Und ich bin doch wonst ein Mann."

COLONEL DACRE had returned to Julian, feeling baffled, harassed, and even irritated, to an extent he could not at all understand. He hated mystery, and he seemed to have had his blood poisoned by drinking great draughts of it. The eyes, some of the tones, and some of the gestures of that strange woman haunted him. Pondering over the eccentricities of her conduct, he had again and again assured himself that she must be mad. Finding that he was unassured by this assurance—finding the haunting images which tormented him reform almost as soon as he had shattered them, and every probable and reasonable hypothesis that presented itself immediately rejected as entirely inadequate—he at last said to himself, "It must be that I am going mad!"

Julian had borne the failure of Colonel Dacre's mission better than his friend had expected. It had made patience under the tediousness of his recovery more difficult, but of this he did not give much sign. More himself now, he noticed that Colonel Dacre looked worn and ill, and seemed out of spirits. Both the friends were more silent than it was their habit to be when together, for they both brooded over things of which they did not speak.

Colonel Dacre had been with Julian a couple of weeks, when Julian one day observed, apparently *apropos* of nothing,

"My good doctor tells me I may venture upon a sea-voyage much sooner than he would like me to risk traveling by land."

"So I should have supposed; but he would not sanction even a sea-voyage for some time yet, I fancy. Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile," Julian broke in, with some eagerness, "I can not keep you chained here. I don't think the place suits you; and, indeed, I don't know why you should have the fatigue of returning here. The quest on which I must start, when I am able, is so entirely my affair that I don't see why you should take any trouble about it. You are too good to me—you spoil me. I have monopolized you far too much and too long already."

"Meanwhile," Colonel Dacre said, resuming interrupted speech as if Julian had not
en, "as you are doing well now, and are,

the doctor tells me, beyond danger of any serious relapse, I have been thinking of leaving you, and of running over to England for a few days."

"I wish you would," Julian cried, warmly. "You must be wanted there. The only thing to which I object is that you should come back again."

"That is civil, certainly," commented his friend, with an affectionate smile. Their tones and looks for each other, especially the older man's for the younger, had, without their own consciousness, grown to be more and more profoundly affectionate of late.

"We understand each other far too well for there to be need of civility between us," said Julian; he added, trying to speak with light mirthfulness, "You have had some experience of what extraordinary things can happen in your absence. Suppose Alice should be run away with as Grace has been?"

His friend answered to this only by an absent, somewhat forced and dreary, smile. Then he said, gravely, with pauses between each phrase,

"You say that quest is entirely your affair. It may be so. Entirely yours, or not yours at all. Entirely mine, or not mine at all. And yet—"

There he broke off abruptly, in the manner of a man to whom some startling word has just been spoken. He gave Julian an intense look, then he frowned and shook his head.

"Yours! What can you mean? And how strangely you are talking! almost as if in your sleep."

Colonel Dacre rubbed his hands across his eyes, then spoke decidedly and sharply,

"In short, my plan is to run over to England, as I said, for a few days, but to be back with you before the time when you should move. I have business in London. Of course, being in London, I should run home."

"I should rather think so!" assented Julian.

Colonel Dacre had spoken the last words with some slight embarrassment. He wished, with a strength that made the gratification of that wish necessary, to see Alice again before—Before what? He lived now under an overhanging sense of something impending which would change the relation between him and Alice. It might be some change in his own health with which he was threatened, or it might be some change in the outward circumstances of his life. Anyway, there was a feverish excitement and intensity about this de-

sire to see Alice again, now, as soon as possible.

During his journey to London, where he really had some business, some inquiries to make of an old friend and fellow-soldier (from whom he learned nothing, except that a particularly sane and sensible man regarded as almost sufficient proof of incipient insanity any doubt of that which for five-and-twenty years had never been doubted), and his further journey from London into Yorkshire, this atmosphere of confused foreboding thickened. While he talked with Major Graham it had cleared, but only to become more dense immediately after. By the time he reached Heatherstone he had thoroughly made up his mind that he would never marry Alice, but, with all his might, would plead Julian's cause with her.

Alice was not at home when Colonel Dacre arrived. She was gone to visit some of the sick poor of the village. He was not sorry to see Olivia alone first. She made him, when he said he had lunched *en route*, condescend to the womanish refreshment of a cup of tea, and then they had an uninterrupted talk. He tried to make Olivia understand what he was far from understanding himself—the state of his mind, the strange confusion of sensations, the bewildered mingling of things new and old. He wished that, without his thrusting it into her face, she should get some glimpse of the—what? Dread? hope? suspicion? presentiment?—which was the very core of all his unsettled trouble. But she did not.

After a few keen questions, after some eager-eyed pondering, she said, in her bright, decided way,

"In spite of the theatrical-seeming improbability of the thing, I should say there can be little doubt that the poor lady, whose agitation appears so much to have touched you, Walter, is Julian's mother. Poor thing! poor thing! And, indeed, I don't see that there is improbability. I could fancy that where such close and mysterious affinity as that between mother and child is in question, the two might well be unconsciously drawn toward each other from distant corners of the earth. But, even if this is so, if this poor lady is Julian's mother—though, of course, loving Julian as you do, almost as if he were your own young brother, or your son, any thing that so deeply concerns him must touch you—still I can't quite understand what there is in this that should so profoundly trouble you."

Colonel Dacre had been sitting, stooping forward, his hand over his eyes. He moved that hand now, and looked up into Olivia's face, wondering that she had got only such superficial hold of his meaning. It struck her then that her brother's eyes had a strange, dazed look—that his whole aspect seemed to have aged—grown haggard. She noticed, too, when he spoke, that his voice was hoarse, and did not sound like his voice.

"Almost as if he were my son! And what,

Olivia, if he were my son? And what, Olivia, of close and mysterious affinity between father and son—and—between husband and wife? And what, Olivia, if all her agitation when I was with her meant—not just that she found in me some likeness to her son! Could that be cause enough? You would not have said so had you seen her. But that in me she found the father of her son—her husband. Olivia—if the dead could come back—"

His sentence had no audible end. And yet she heard its end; even as his own heart had heard its secret thought outspoken for the first time.

All the blood left Olivia's face, her features seemed to sharpen, her eyes to dilate.

"It is this, then!" she cried.

But after a brief pause her natural color returned; she said, firmly and decidedly,

"This is madness, brother! The dead do not come back. And, brother, you make me very anxious about your health. It is not like you to let morbid fancies get hold of you."

"What proof—sufficient and unquestionable proof—of her death have we ever had?" asked that same strange voice almost fiercely.

"For a quarter of a century no doubt has ever crossed us," Olivia answered, impressively. "From the first, the impossibility that it should be otherwise was never questioned. Why should we doubt—why should we question now? Indeed, brother, the presence in your mind of such self-torturing delusions justifies a keen anxiety about your health."

"Delusions!" he echoed; "for you, Olivia, it is easy enough to set them down as delusions. But tell me, if they are delusions, how do you account for their origin and growth?"

"We may ask that about any delusions, Walter. In this case, I should account for them by something in the state of your health."

She got up and went to him. Standing behind him, she drew his gray head to lean against her breast as, in his boyish troubles, his dark head had sometimes leaned. She pushed his hair back from his forehead with her kind hand, and stooped over him and kissed him, with that love she had for him, even more a mother's than a sister's. He let his head rest so a few minutes; then he took her hands and kissed them, got up and went to the window. Oh, the fair, sweet, young world, where all was hope and promise! Its brightness and its beauty smote him sharply. He thrust his hand inside his waistcoat, grasping at his heart, as if he could get hold of his pain.

"You can not tell me you feel well, brother," Olivia persisted.

"I am not conscious of feeling exactly ill," he answered her; "yet, as you say, I am not very well. I feel confused—oppressed—depressed; I don't know which to call it. Languid, with lead in my veins. No buoyancy left in me. In short, Olivia, as if old age had suddenly caught hold of me."

"Old age! Nonsense, Walter! Am I not

more than ten years your senior? Has old age got hold of me? Is there no buoyancy left in me? I will give you a most unromantic explanation of your condition—your liver must be out of order. You never could bear much railway traveling without being the worse for it."

"Possibly you are not so wrong," he answered, with a melancholy smile.

There was a little pause. He was still looking out of the window. Then, presently, he said, in tones through which ran a curious thrill:

"Here comes she who should be the very genius of this fair, bright young time—Alice!"

"Does she see you, brother?"

"No. And how languidly she walks, Olivia! She is overweighted in that heavy velvet dress. Why does she still wear it?"

"I haven't been able to persuade her to put on any one of the pretty spring dresses I bought for her in town, when we went to see Grace, till you came home. She will be, in all ways, better for having you at home again, Walter. She has grown rather thin and pale since—"

"Since our poor Julian's accident," Colonel Dacre interrupted, eagerly.

"Only since that because it was that which took you away from her so abruptly," was answered, with sharp and stern significance.

"Won't you meet her, Olivia, and tell her I am here?"

"The shock of joy doesn't hurt young things. But perhaps, as Alice is not very strong just now, I had better go to her." She turned back as she was leaving the room, and said—and there was both command and entreaty in her bright eyes and clear tones—"Walter, you will not be so inconsiderate as to trouble Alice with your delusions?"

"Not now—not yet."

CHAPTER II.

THE LAST TIME.

"Shall sharpest pathos blight us, knowing all
Life needs for life is possible to will?"

COLONEL DACRE was left some time alone. Olivia at first failed to find Alice, who had not come straight toward the house, but had turned off toward the terrace-garden. Then Alice, to whom the suddenness of this return had suggested misfortune, possibly even Julian's death, had needed a little while to grow calm.

He leaned in the open window and looked out. The soft, sweet, songful spring world was, while he looked, transfigured beyond itself by the last sunshine. And every sight and scent and song spoke to him of the fair young girl for whom he waited, who was to have been his wife. The time when he had thought of *Alice otherwise than as the fair creature who "was to have been" his wife*, seemed to him *off and long ago*.

It appeared to him that it must have been of Alice he had dreamed all the dreams of his youth; that it must have been of Alice that all the sense of promise of his springs had prophesied; that to Alice all the love with which he had ever loved women had been given. And yet now, when he tried to picture to himself how Alice would look, how Alice would smile when she came to him, out of Alice's face would shine the haunting eyes of that strange woman.

Curiously enough, it had always been difficult to him to call the complete Alice before his mind when she was absent—just as in winter we find it difficult to remember the complete spring; but this substitution for hers of any thing not hers was new. His heart, his very soul, ached with complicated, incongruous pain. The unshed tears of the past seemed to mingle with the anguished, bitter regrets of the present, till the combination threatened to be more than the strong man could bear.

Presently, a thrush thrilled out such a song as a nightingale could hardly have surpassed. That sound seemed a drop too much in the cup. He was about to break into passionate invective, when some slight sound made him turn, to find Alice close beside him. His arm was thrown round her; but he did not crush her against him, as his impulse was, neither did he press his hot forehead against her soft young neck, as he longed to do, but he folded her to him as tenderly as he might have held a flower which he feared to spoil.

"Oh! Lonel, it is good, good, good, to have you home again!" cried Alice, emphasizing her words by the pressure of her cheek against him, conscious of that dear sense of safety, and of right, and of rest, which she always felt when she was near him.

"It is not for long—just yet, my sweet one," he answered, as his hungry eyes feasted on the fairness of the flower-like face which lay against him, possibly, as he thought, for the last time.

"No?" she questioned. Her tone was plaintive. She lifted her head and looked into his face. Her look, too, was a question, a long and sad one, and her eyes filled with tears. "It doesn't seem much use for the spring to be so lovely, and every thing so exquisite, when you are away," she said. "It only makes your being away feel so much sadder. And you look so—so tired, Lonel."

"I am tired, dear. I have had quite too much traveling for a man of my age."

Her eyes inquired if that allusion to his age were meant for a joke; she found no sign in his face that it was so.

"Olivia says so much traveling is not at all good for you," she remarked. "Olivia says," she continued, blushing vividly, but speaking with simplicity and quiet resoluteness to say what she wished to say, "that, when we are married, you must stay at home with your wife."

He could not manage to smile. She was thinking how noble his dear, dark face looked, defined against the clear-glowing sky, and at

the same time wondering what made it look so sad, and set, and stern; the question whether Julian was much worse, so ill or so injured that he would never recover, was timidly quivering on the edge of speech, when she met an expression from Colonel Dacre's eyes that troubled the quietness of her heart, and made her lashes droop. It was an expression so unfamiliar, so almost fiercely passionate, that it gave her a curious feeling for the moment that they were not themselves.

He had listened to an inward voice urging him to disregard presentiments, defy memories, forget that mad infatuation which made him incline to prefer Julian's happiness before his own, and just let things run along their already-appointed course, only hastening them a little, making Alice safely his at once. He had listened to that voice, but only for a brief moment; then he took his arm from round Alice, pulled her favorite chair up to the window, saying,

"Sit down, dear; I keep you standing too long."

She obeyed him, and with folded hands looked up into his face with an unconscious devoutness.

"You look as if you thought you were going to be scolded." He smiled his very own smile now; she was at home with him again.

"I feel rather like it, too. Have I any way displeased you?"

"No, you foolish child." He looked at her kindly, and pushed the little soft cloud of hair back from her white forehead. "But, Alice," he went on, speaking very gravely now, "I myself did something which it now displeases me to remember when I asked you one day to be my wife. I want you to forget what was partly a folly in me, and partly a fault."

He had not meant to be so abrupt; he seemed driven to abruptness for safety. He had taken Alice's breath away; her color went and came. She continued to look up at him as if she listened, but for a few moments she neither saw his face nor heard his voice.

When she came to herself she could hardly believe that she heard aright: Colonel Dacre was pleading for Julian, praising Julian!

"There is no one like him, Alice, no, not one, among the young men of to-day. He is as sweet and tender as he is noble and strong. It is Julian, my child, who is worthy of your love, whom you should make happy with your love. Julian, who is not troubled with memories, with remorses, as I am, dear. Julian, who loves you with all the vigor of a first love."

Colonel Dacre spoke with an earnestness that paled his face and intensified his eyes. His vibrating voice stirred the very depths of Alice's being; but she was utterly ignorant of what the commotion within her meant. She was conscious of pain, trouble, amazement, of a sense of sudden ruin and loss, of every thing coming to an end. At least, that is what it all felt most like at first.

Her one word "Lonel!" was spoken in a tone of most piteous reproach, and with what felt like a throb of heart-break.

Stooping down, he kissed, as gravely as a father might have done, the fold of pain on her forehead. And then he talked on in the same strain; till Alice, having recovered a little from the first shock, said in tones, and with an expression of face in which he failed to recognize any hitherto known phase of his gentle Alice,

"Julian! No more of Julian! I am sick of Julian's name! Your Julian, of whom you make a hero, must be a selfish traitor, who has taught you to mistrust your own Alice. I hate him! Yes, I hate him!" So flashed out the hidden virago in this girl, and then she threw herself forward on the cushioned window-seat, and sobbed and cried with a violence and *abandon* such as in all her life she had never shown or felt before.

It was Colonel Dacre's turn to be struck dumb with amazement. He was conscious of utter helplessness and bewilderment.

What could he do? What could he say?

When he thought there was any chance of Alice's being able to hear him he began an energetic defense of Julian, and condemnation of his own blundering stupidity. He saw that she held back her sobs to listen. When he had finished speaking, she lifted up her disfigured face, and said,

"If, then, it is no fault of his, nothing he has said, what is it, Lonel? Won't you trust me with the truth? It would be less unhappy for me to know the truth, even if the truth is just that you don't want me."

"By Heaven," he cried, vehemently, "it is not that that is the truth!" He added, more deliberately, "It is hard to know what is the truth. Possibly what you say, that I don't want you, ought to be the truth. Anyway, it is only to Julian, if even to Julian that I could surrender you."

"Remember, if you please, Lonel, that I am not only a thing—I am a woman." She spoke with pale, opal flashes of suppressed passion. "My heart is yours to keep, but not yours to give away. I love you, Lonel, you. All my gratitude, my reverence, my duty is yours. I love you, Lonel, you. I love you, I am sure I love you, with a love that will leave my life worthless if it is to be torn out of my heart." She had taken one of his hands in both hers. As she added, "I am sure of this, quite sure!" she squeezed his hand with a power he could not have believed was in those soft, slight fingers.

"My noble girl!" he said, with a sort of dreamy melancholy. For some moments no word was uttered by either.

Then "By Heaven, this is difficult!" cried Colonel Dacre, and, as he spoke, with his free hand he passed his handkerchief across his forehead, wiping away moisture that stood there in great drops.

On that, in her Old-World, womanly, almost motherly tone, Alice said,

"Why not let things be? Why try and trouble yourself in this way? Surely, there is something more than I understand?"

"There is, dear. Alice, I must not marry you. My fair, sweet, always-beloved child, it can not be. It would not be for your happiness; the disparity of years is too great. I feel strangely aged and worn since— In short, dear, believe me, it is young Julian you should love. Alice, for my sake, let yourself love Julian. You can't feel it impossible when I ask it."

But Alice dropped his hand, and got up.

"I find I can not bear any thing, even from you, Lonel," she said, haughtily. "Your words insult me. You speak as if the breath of a few words could blow my love from one man to another; as if—" she panted.

"This is not my gentle Alice," he broke in.

"No, it is not," she said; "I don't feel there is any gentleness left in me."

And then, the flood-gates of angry passion set wide, Alice poured forth such reproach, almost such invective, that Colonel Dacre could only say, in wonder and grief,

"Alice, Alice; is this Alice?"

Alice was "possessed" as she had never been before. There was a heat in her brain of which she had had no experience before. All the blood of her body seemed to mount there, to surge and to boil there. She felt stung almost to madness; without knowing by what, she was entirely ignorant of the meaning of the drama of passions transacting within her. She felt, indeed, as if she scorned and hated Julian—as if she had never loved Colonel Dacre as, in despair, she loved him now; and yet as if she needed to torture him, to make him suffer, as he had made her suffer.

When at last she came to an end, "You are wonderfully harsh in your judgment of my poor Julian," Colonel Dacre said, coldly. "You seem to forget all gentle womanliness and pity for the poor fellow who has gone through so much, and who, if he was surprised into loving you, has striven so nobly against a love that in itself was noble—so nobly that this very fact should raise him in your esteem. Julian has said—and I know he would not say it if he did not feel it—that he would not have you love him, that you would cease to be his ideal Alice if your love transferred itself from me to one he thinks so much less worthy. And yet you have spoken of him as if his conduct had been blackly treacherous. Alice, it strikes me you are harsh to Julian in the way generous people are only harsh to themselves, or to those so near and so dear as to be as themselves."

Alice felt a heavy blow had been dealt her by those last words. In his noble simplicity, Colonel Dacre was as far from intending them to say to her what they did say, as Alice, in her ignorant innocence, had been from suspecting the truth of what they revealed.

Indeed, Colonel Dacre, in the bewilderment

produced by the very unexpectedness of this sudden storm, and with his want of experience of the subtleties of even the most simple feminine heart, had almost come to think that Alice, indeed, despised Julian, and that the sort of instinctive consciousness he had at one time had that Alice's heart was escaping from her own control to fly into Julian's keeping, must have been erroneous.

If so, what then? Why, God pity them all! Colonel Dacre, when he had said those last words which had smitten Alice so heavily, remained silent. He was just then chiefly feeling a sense of masculine clumsiness, elephantine unwilldiness, which made all movement dangerous. And suddenly Alice, proud little Alice, who till to-day had not known that she was proud, threw herself on the ground and laid her face on his feet. She was immediately lifted up. Poor Colonel Dacre wondered "What next?" as he put her into the chair from which she had risen in her anger.

Obstinate as well as proud, Alice said to herself that if Colonel Dacre did not want her, pushed her away, she would yield him up. Of course she could not force herself upon him, but she would not yield herself to Julian, or to any other. The spirit of that resolve was in her eyes as she looked up to him, and said,

"Can you ever forgive me? How I have spoken to you! How I have felt toward you! I could not have believed it! What has come over me? Now I only want to say that if, for reasons which must be good and right, because they are yours, you do not wish to do me the honor of making me your wife, I must still claim the privilege of remaining always your Alice, of living always with you and Olivia. I am yours to keep, but not yours to give away. You shall not ever be able to give me to any one else. All the use, all the happiness I can ever be to any body, I will be to you."

"Alice, Alice, your words are as cruel as they are rash."

"Listen for a minute more. I want to be quite truthful. There was a time, but I can't now tell if it was an hour, a day, or a week, when I thought too much about Julian, and not enough about you. I think you must somehow have known of this, and then first have begun to think of giving me away; but when I knew it, I set myself to conquer myself. If I could have found out the traitorous spot in my heart, I would have cut it out. Still, there was that hour, or day, or week, and you must have known it, and have begun to think I was too foolish and too light to be your wife. But, Lonel, the punishment is very heavy. If it is your judgment, I submit. I never thought I was fit to be your wife, but I will never be any one's, if not yours; I must be something to you."

"Be my daughter, dear child, and the wife of the man I love as if he were my own son. And, Alice," he went on, "for pity's sake not that tone with me—as if I were judge, you

criminal! And you can know me so little as to think that it is because I do not value you, that I would yield you to Julian?"

"Forgive me. It is so difficult for me to know what to think, what to say."

"Poor child! Be guided by me. Remain to me as a daughter, and I shall keep your love always. If I made you my wife, you would find you did not love me."

"But why, why, why say this first now—"

"Because an old fool has come to his senses. It needed a phantom from the past to bring me back to them," he answered, with a sort of self-concentrated scorn and mournfulness.

"It does not make you happier to come to your senses," she said, a little bitterly. "I must go now. I can't understand any thing. The whole world whirls round. I only know I will love you, Lonel; yes, always. I will be yours always; I can have no hope, no wish, no thought so dear as to help to make you happy."

He held her in his arms in a long farewell. And then presently she found herself alone in her own room, to the door of which he had taken her.

"That is over," he said, again wiping his forehead as he turned away. "God bless my darling!"

He dined with Olivia alone. Alice did not leave her room. Olivia tried to amuse him by talking about Grace, whom she had so lately seen in London.

CHAPTER III.

DESERTED.

"The heart which, like a staff, was one
For mine to rest and lean upon,
The strongest on the longest day,
With steadfast love, is caught away."

ALICE locked herself into her room and fell on her knees by her bedside; but it was a good long while before she prayed, or thought, or even wept or felt. Her life seemed to be fading away from her, passing out of reach; nothing left to take hold of. She herself seemed to be dishonored in being disowned. When she could feel, and weep, and think, and pray, with the passionate exaggeration of a young thing suffering vividly for the first time, she was inclined to cry out with wringing of hands that her all was lost to her, inclined to question if she had needed to be brought to God's footstool by having all else taken from her.

If Alice had, when she first knew Julian, already been Colonel Dacre's wife, she could hardly have more strenuously resisted, and more sternly resented, any wandering of her love from its old allegiance.

It was part of Alice's moral creed that love and duty must go hand in hand. That her conduct should violate her creed would have hurt Alice's spiritual pride, as well as higher things in her nature. The old love was so in-

grained, so habitual, so, one might almost say, a part of her religion, her Lonel having been always so much in her prayers, that it was not a thing she could grow out of, or throw off. The only thing that could happen in regard to it would be that she should learn to recognize it more correctly as what it was, to give it its right place, call it by its right name, and then, when this was done, find out how happily other love might be harmonized with it.

That this could be done she had no suspicion. Nor could it have been, things being as they were. She had, therefore, looked upon encroachments of the new interest as able to lead only to what must be a shame, a remorse, a misery, a crime, and so, unconsciously to herself, there was a slight taste of bitterness in all her thoughts of Julian.

To Alice, till she had known Julian, every thing had been wont to seem crystal-clear as her own single-minded simplicity. Right and wrong were two sharply defined figures, whose identity could never be confused, whose hands could never touch, who could never stand on common ground. After she knew Julian it was different; she did not feel so sure about any thing, life did not seem so easy, duty not quite so unmistakable. Nevertheless, except for that brief time of which she had spoken to Colonel Dacre, and of which she thought always with sorrow and with shame, her feelings toward Colonel Dacre appeared only to have deepened and to have strengthened as her nature had been touched to some approach to heroism by resistance of temptation, and the effort in all ways to think of another before herself.

When she had first begun to consider herself as some day to be Colonel Dacre's wife, her imagination had chiefly dwelt on her own honor, glory, and happiness in such a future; but Olivia had dwelt so much on the preciousness of Alice's love to her brother, of the happiness it was to bring him, the way it was to atone to him for past suffering and self-sacrifice, that Alice had gradually been wound up to a higher and more unselfish strain, and had come to realize something of what she was to Colonel Dacre, something of how lonely and how desolate in his heart of hearts he would feel life to be in which Alice was not.

"I'm nearly fifteen years older than Walter," Olivia would say. "I can't live forever, much as I prize my life in this bright, busy world, where there is so much to do. You, Alice, will be Walter's all when I am gone."

Such sayings as these, and the thoughts they suggested, had imperceptibly changed Alice's way of looking forward to the future. She did not now think of the honor and the glory to her, Alice Fairfax, of being Mrs. Colonel Dacre; not that she did not feel it would be honor and glory, but it appeared to her now as childishness to think chiefly of that. When she thought of the future in which she was to be Lonel's wife, it was as of a more complete temple-service, always and more closely in the presence of

the idol. As a young enthusiast dedicates herself to a religious life, she would have dedicated herself to her married life, meaning to have no will, no wish, but her husband's, no aim but his happiness, no opinions but such as were his. Her married life was to be useful, peaceful—a fair life of quiet duty. In serving her husband she would serve God.

Were all these fine, fair, exalted fancies to fade? If Alice had unconsciously been nourishing spiritual pride, that spiritual pride was to be brought low. For she saw her own heart now by the light of Colonel Dacre's words, and knew that she had loved Julian. Therefore, every thing seemed lost! If she were not to be Lonel's wife, she would be no one else's. If she were not to be Lonel's wife, she would still enforce herself to give him all her love, all her service, as his child, his daughter, might do.

In that thought ignorant little Alice seemed to find something safe and soothing, as—if she had been a Catholic maiden in "the good old times," in the mood in which she now was—she would have found something safe and soothing in resolving to be a nun.

When, by-and-by, Alice lifted up her head, conscious of a strong desire to see Colonel Dacre, to say "good-night" to him, to have his loving kiss, and to know she was forgiven for her passionate behavior, she found the room quite dark. She got up, feeling very sick and weak, struck a match, and looked at her watch. It was past ten. What was happening, she wondered? Why had no one come to look after her? She felt a forlorn little outcast. Colonel Dacre had said,

"Give orders that Alice is not disturbed, Olivia. She was a good deal agitated; perhaps she will lie down and sleep."

He himself had come twice to her door and listened. But he had come softly, and Alice, her head buried in her arms, had not known of it. Now, suddenly, she heard carriage-wheels on the drive. The hall door, the carriage door, wheels again, driving away. She dashed open her window and leaned out of it. She called,

"Lonel! Lonel! don't leave me! don't go away!"

He did not hear her, he did not see her. And yet, just before the turn in the drive which took him out of sight, she had seen him, bare-headed, looking toward her window; the moon was up, and shone upon his face.

This seemed to Alice a killing sorrow; a bruise, a maiming more than she could bear. She ran to find Olivia—almost ran against her, coming slowly up the stairs, after watching her brother driven away.

"Olivia, where is Lonel gone?"

Olivia put her arm round Alice and drew her back into her room.

"Surely you know, dear! Why, back to Julian Farquhar. This was only a hasty dash to England, because he so longed to see us—
b means to see you, Alice."

"Why did he not bid me 'good-bye'?" demanded Alice.

"He came twice to your door, but there was no movement; he thought you might be asleep."

"He came twice to my door? And I did not know! And oh, I so badly wanted to be kissed and forgiven—and he is gone!"

And poor Alice broke into choking sobs. Olivia did what she could to comfort the girl. But in Alice's heart all night, whether she slept or woke, there moaned on a sobbing sense of wrong and change and loss. The wrong done by her. The change and loss suffered by her.

A few days later, Alice had a letter from Colonel Dacre; she had never known him speak to her with more intense though restrained tenderness than this letter spoke. But it was not the tenderness of a lover, but of a father. Any other form of love from him to her, he told her, would lie upon her young life "like frost on lilies."

He bade her ask Olivia to tell her all the story of his past, of his brief married life before she was born—also of what had happened to him lately, and the impression that had been made upon him.

CHAPTER IV.

SIR LAUNCELOT AND SIR GALAHAD.

"And so he kneeled down and asked him his blessing, and after took off his helm and kissed him. And there was great joy between them, for there is no tongue can tell the joy that they made either of other."—MORRIS D'ARTUR.

COLONEL DACRE is again with Julian at the villa. When in London, he had seen Sir Everard's agents, and arranged as to paying on Julian's behalf, a share of the expenses of the place, from which Julian had not yet been moved since he was brought to it, insensible at his mother's command.

Sir Everard's staff of servants had, of course, been dismissed, and Miss Kennedy's effects all forwarded. The only sign of the former inhabitants left was some property of "Mrs. Winter's," which no one knew what to do with. The great house was very empty. Sister Martha, as it chanced that there was just then little sickness in the neighborhood, remained as part nurse, part housekeeper, with two or three women under her. She had formed the most genuinely affectionate attachment for her gentle patient.

Colonel Dacre, toward evening—a May evening, intoxicatingly splendid, the atmosphere almost overwealthy with color, the air overheavily laden with perfume—of jasmine and rose, of lemon, orange, and acacia flowers—stood at an open window looking out. He had returned only the day before, but he had made up his mind to start the next day on what Julian called his "quest." It should not be,

ought not to be, longer postponed, and Julian's movements must not be hurried.

He turned to speak to Julian—to whom he had said hardly any thing of his recent journey beyond the bare fact that he had found all well at Heatherstone, though Alice looked rather pale—and then, as he turned to speak to him, he, in the unconscious way one does such a thing when the mind is preoccupied, took up a small volume, which Julian had just laid down. He began to speak, opening and shutting the book, without having looked at it, and passing it from one hand to another in a nervous manner. Julian's attention wandered from his words to his actions.

"That is a Testament," Julian admonished him.

Colonel Dacre then laid the book down, and went on speaking. A moment after, still in absence of mind, he took it up again. This time he fixed his eyes upon it, and stopped speaking. It was a German Testament. He turned to the title-page. A sound escaped him—neither a cry nor a groan. It seemed to Julian that a white blaze of excitement blanched his bronzed tint.

"What about this? how came you by it?" he demanded.

"It is the little Testament she left. Surely I told you about it. But no; I remember I did not find it till you were gone. What is it? What have you discovered?"

"If this is your mother's book, then— But no; be calm, my boy, be calm."

"It is I need to bid you be calm."

"That is quite true. I believe I am going mad."

There was a pause, during which Colonel Dacre fought hard to remain his own master; then he said, very quietly,

"Sibyl" was my wife's name. This is written as she wrote her name. This date is a later date by five years than the date of her death. Do you see what this must mean, and also what it may mean?" Then, before Julian could utter a word, he went on, pressing his hand heavily on Julian's shoulder, "Don't speak—not now—wait."

The book in his hand, he left the room and the house. Julian dared not think. The happiness, the possibility of which pressed upon him, seemed too enormous.

When Colonel Dacre, after some hours, returned, his face showed he had gone through some great crisis. Perhaps, like Sir Launcelot, he had wept "as he had been a child that had been beaten." He came to Julian's side; his hand grasped Julian's shoulder.

"Mine!" he said—"my heart and my flesh cry out that it is so. You must know what I mean, but you can't know the joy of it."

In the old days of knighthood and chivalry, it is of "the best knights of the world" that the most weeping and kissing of each other, and swooning (*not always for mere physical causes*), is recorded; but in these days, when the stal-

wart manhood of our modern knights is not so visibly put to the proof, perhaps we hardly dare contemplate their moments of "weakness." So we will copy the wise words of the old chronicler, and say that between the modern Sir Launcelot and Sir Galahad there was great joy, and "there is no tongue can tell the joy that they made either of other, and many a friendly word spoken between, the which is no need here to be rehearsed. And great, too, were the thanks and the "lovings" given unto God. They both said, they both felt, that it seemed to them now as if they had always known it, so much each heart had "given unto" the other. There was no need of learning to love between them.

Great joy is far harder to realize than great sorrow. Is it that it lies so much farther beyond the experience of most of us?

When Julian was left alone—Colonel Dacre started that night to seek for Sibyl—he felt like a happy child. The prayer and praise his heart offered up were of child-like fervor and simplicity. He did not wish to sleep. There was so much beautifulness and happiness to be conscious of, so much wonderfulness and mysteriousness to ponder about, that to let the wings of sleep fold over him seemed a waste and a pity. Nevertheless, sleep surprised him. He slept also like a child—a child overworn with pleasure—and woke in the morning to have joy come pouring in upon his soul, even as the exquisite morning sunshine poured in at his windows.

CHAPTER V.

AT LAST!

"After long grief and pain
To find the arms of my true-love
Round me once again!"

COLONEL DACRE traveled far, only to have to retrace his steps. It was within a day's journey of Fiordimare that he at last came upon any recent track of Sibyl. Constantly moving, through the restlessness of her longing, each movement had brought her, almost it had seemed to her against her own will, nearer to where she had left her son.

At the Osteria of a little gray, grim village among the Apennines, the houses of which seemed like some natural growth of the rocks on which they stood, he heard the latest news of her whom he now unhesitatingly named to himself as his wife. She had been there but three days before, and had started from thence on foot (thus proving she could not be meaning to wander any distance) after having made inquiries as to the probability of finding accommodation in some small farm-house in that neighborhood. The little luggage she had brought with her to the Osteria had been fetched from it the same evening by a peasant belonging to Mother Giannetta's farm; in all

likelihood, therefore, she was remaining at old Giannetta's house.

Colonel Dacre followed his wife's example, and started from the inn on foot; the place he wanted was only two or three miles distant. He found it without difficulty. A barn-like block of building, with just sufficient windows (those furnished with decaying jalousies) to expel darkness, trusting, evidently, to its thick walls to keep out the cold of winter and the heat of summer.

It was sheltered by a fine group of sweet chestnut-trees, at the feet of which, some weeks before, primroses had flowered in English profusion. One large acacia grew close by, and freely flung about the faded blossoms from its snowy bunches. In front of the house a large, square, red-tiled platform commanded a magnificent view of the bay. There was no village near and no other farmstead. It was a sad and solitary-looking place.

Old Giannetta was sitting knitting at her door when Colonel Dacre came up to it.

"Yes." She had a lodger. Already, with Southern quickness of sympathy, she had interested herself in her lodger; but her keen eyes, perusing Colonel Dacre's face, assured her that he could not want any one for their harm.

The lady was not within at present, she said, but, being too weak to wander far, could not but be close by. She went to the edge of the platform, and, screening her eyes from the afternoon sun, peered about.

A narrow ravine, down which there was a steep zigzag path, the lower and more sheltered part of which was overhung by lemon-trees, ran from just in front of the house down to the sea; to where, on a little promontory of white sand, a gigantic cypress stood sentinel.

If madame had descended, why, then, so said old Giannetta, only the good God knew how she should ever get her home again. The way was far, the road was rough, and madame weakly.

A ragged, sun-burned keeper of goats here joined them, and testified to having seen the lady begin the descent.

"I will find her, and help her home," Colonel Dacre said.

"There will be need," the old woman assured him.

Colonel Dacre began to descend very slowly; any turn of the path might bring them face to face. He was strenuously trying to steady himself, to overcome a nervous agitation greater than he had ever yet experienced.

By-and-by, finding the way so long, so rough, so steep, remembering what the old woman had said of her guest's weakness, an idea occurred to him which made him shudder, and caused him to quicken his steps. What if Sibyl had come down here to die, never meaning to come up again.

At length he had turned the last corner, and as he came out from under the fragrant, overshadow-

ing boughs. At first he thought the whole scene entirely solitary—sand, shore, and sea. Then he became aware that what he had taken for the shadow of a rock was a black figure sitting beneath it, looking across the bay to the opposite mountains, at the foot of one of whose folds must lie Fiordimare.

How was he to avoid too sharply startling her? He began to be afraid for her. And yet he had a sort of feeling that she must expect him—a feeling as if she sat there waiting for him.

He so contrived as to come first within her range of sight while still at some considerable distance, that she might watch his gradual approach. From his breast-pocket, as he drew near, he took her Testament. When he was near enough to be sure she could not fail to catch his words, he stood still in front of her, and said, simply and quietly, as he might have spoken if they had parted yesterday, but with an intensity of gentleness,

"Sibyl, wife, I have brought you back the book you left with our son."

She was looking up at him, but she made him no answer. Her hands just lightly moved together as if for prayer, but ceased to have strength for voluntary movement before they clasped each other, and fell heavily on to her knees. The face upturned to his, the eyes down into which he looked, seemed as if all intelligence, all power of any kind had gone out of her. Life was in abeyance.

She heard his voice, tender and full of pity; she saw his eyes, very heavens of compassionate love. But it was as if between her and him a wall of misty glass were set through which it would be death to dash.

It seemed to her for an eternity that things remained exactly so, she looking up at him, he looking down on her. But he broke the spell; stretching out his hands to her, he said,

"I have been many days searching for my wife; will she not speak to me?" Then he added, with a tone something in which seemed like to kill her with keenness of joy, "Will she not lay her hands about my neck? Will she not let me take her into my arms?"

With an indescribable cry,

"A cry that rather seem'd
For some new death than for a life renew'd,"

she threw herself forward upon the sand, laid her face upon his feet, and folded her arms round them. He could not move. By-and-by, lifting her head to the level of his knees, she looked up into his face, and it seemed as if her very soul strained through her eyes to touch him with adoration and entreaty.

"You forgive me?"

"For what is there need I should forgive you, Sibyl?"

His tone was grave. For the first time the possibility that there might be much to forgive crossed him. For the first time—"forever a man of worship and of prowess dreadeth least

always perils; for they ween every man, be as they be."

"For every thing," she answered; "for every thing except any wandering of my heart from you, till it went out toward your son. For every thing but that. Not for that; for I am as purely and truly your wife as on the day you left me."

"What, then, can I have to forgive, my poor Sibyl?"

"Every thing; but chiefly this lie of mine in being alive."

He lifted her from the ground, and held her in his arms and laid his face against her face. Would joy do what no sorrow had been able to do, and kill her? wondered Sibyl. This felt like death. It looked, too, like death, to Colonel Dacre, when he lifted his face from hers and looked upon her.

He gently laid her on the soft, warm sand, folded the shawl that had dropped from round her to make her a pillow, chafed her hands, and cherished them in his, and it was not long before her wonderful eyes opened and looked up at him. He stooped and kissed their lids; and she did not die of joy. One great cry of gratitude to God escaped her; after that she was calm, putting off till by-and-by the recognition of what this meeting meant.

It had been some time no longer sunlight, but moonlight, when her husband's arm got Sibyl home again. There had been many pauses by the way to rest, where, through the fragrant lemon-boughs, still bearing some late fruit and blossom, they got lovely glimpses of the sea and of the mountains. It was strange how few words had been spoken between them, and yet how much had been said. Each word had seemed to hold a world of meaning.

In the clean, cool, red-tiled salon, where the air was laden with the scent of acacia-flowers blown in by the warm wind of evening, Sibyl's solitary supper stood waiting for her. Something in the sight, suggesting so different a future from the past—a future in which she was to be, please God, no more solitary, to live no more alone, something in this very simple and homely sight—touched Sibyl in some inexplicable manner. She paused on the threshold of the room and faltered, smiled into her husband's face, and then, her arms thrown round him, as they might have been on that day of their parting, which felt at once as yesterday and as more than a lifetime ago, she broke into an ecstasy of tears. This seemed to lighten her overlaid heart; but what gave her strength for self-control, and the suppression of further show of emotion, was the look of her husband's face. Not unhappy, she humbly thanked God—not unhappy; but still he looked as if he had, one way and another, gone through more than his strength would bear.

She made him sit down. She begged from

Giannetta a bottle of her best wine. She waited on him; if he would have let her, she would have waited on him on her knees! But her face told plain enough that she was on the knees of her heart. More than once he kissed the hand that served him. All the anguish of her past seemed as nothing, weighed against her joy of this hour.

When they had supped and rested (and for both of them that frugal meal taken together had a solemn significance), they separated for a few hours. He was to fetch her very early in the morning, in the carriage by which he had come, and which was still waiting at the little inn, and they were to go together to Julian. Was such happiness to be borne? Could she bear it, and live?

Left alone, she made her few preparations for the journey of the morning, paid Giannetta, as if, the old woman said, she would pay the weight in gold of all that she had eaten and drank, and of the bed and the chair on which she had rested; told the old woman, in a few sentences, her story, and kissed her wholesome, sun-browned face; and then lay down, dressed, upon her bed, with a sort of awe upon her, wishing to spend the few hours of the warm, white night in spiritual meditation, in communion with God; lying, with folded hands, motionless, she might have been dead, or waiting for death. In fact, she lay in fear of death! That she, who had courted and coveted death, should now be allowed life, seemed more than she dare hope.

For her husband: he spent the night at the Osteria, partly in concentrated thought—thought both this-worldly and other-worldly—partly in writing to Olivia. Over that letter to Olivia he spent two hours, and the "sweat of his brow." Yet it was a short letter, one it did not take her ten minutes to read, even though its hieroglyphs were more than usually mystical. Its wording was strong and terse. He told Olivia what had happened; he told Olivia his plans. He meant to send his son home to Heatherstone almost immediately, "to your care and Alice's," under Dr. Valery's escort. He meant, for the present, to remain abroad with his wife, spending the summer, probably, in Switzerland.

It was in a postscript that he wrote:

"I leave you, Olivia, to choose a fit time, but at a fit time it would be well to let Alice understand" (before writing "Alice," each time the name occurred his pen paused; when he wrote the word it was in firmer, fairer characters than any thing else in the letter was written) "that when I speak of remaining abroad for 'the present,' I mean till Alice has married Julian. If possible, let that be this autumn; then the young ones can come abroad for a time (Julian will hardly bear an English winter yet), and we old ones can come home."

THE END.

THERE can hardly be an end written now to this story of lives that are still going on. A few words may give the facts of the three or four years that have passed since the last recorded event, and then we will leave the lives to go on.

Alice and Julian were married before the cold weather of the first winter after Julian's accident set in. They went to Fiordimare to spend that first winter. Not at the great villa, but at the house where Julian had been with the Burmanders, in the garden of which he had lighted the sacrificial fragrant fire to burn the too precious manuscript made for him by Alice, and where he had so often thought, in spite of himself, of Alice.

"Die Ehrfurcht wirft mich ihr zu Füßen,
Die Sehnsucht mich an ihre Brust."

And here how happy they were! No phantom of duty, either stern or gentle of visage, coming between them. Just love, pure, simple, natural, at once most real and most ideal, just love meeting love! And here Alice worked for Julian again, and here, at last, Julian's book (which when it came out won him some praise) was finished.

And Alice? Had she felt that in letting herself love Julian, and be so merely happy according to her gentleness and youth, she had fallen to a lower spiritual level than that of the life she had looked to lead? Had this been so, it would no doubt have been for her good. But probably there was some saving element of sorrow to serve as salt to merely happy love, and also there was excuse for more than ordinary service and devotion. For Julian has not regained robustness. His face at times looks overrefined and delicate, and since that accident he is often something of an invalid. Alice found it wonderfully easy to learn to say "my father" to and of Colonel Dacre—so wonderfully easy that it seemed as if it were only calling him with her lips what her heart had always called him. She found it wonderfully easy also to learn to love Julian's mother passing well. And the love Sibyl had for her was as a passion for something most precious.

Even Olivia was happy in the new state of things, for she could not doubt but that Walter was thoroughly content, at ease, at rest. Even

Olivia owned that to say "Alice and Julian," or "Julian and Alice," had always seemed strangely natural.

Olivia is not so strong as she was a few years ago, but she shows no other sign of age. Her hair can not grow whiter than it has been for thirty years, and it does not lose its silky sheen. They all tell her that her eyes are as bright and her cheeks as smooth and soft as ever. There is no doubt that her sympathies are as quick and her intelligence as keen. Nor does her love for the world, and the things of the world, fade or fail; nor is there need it should, for the love with which she loves them is love she can take with her out of the world—love that is not to be separated from love of God.

Poor, foolish old General Burmander, in the very misery of his loneliness of loss without his Marian, married again. Ashamed of this, he could not be persuaded to show his white head, and his kind, bluff, red face, in the Heatherstone neighborhood. But old friends looked after him a little, either for his own sake or his Marian's; and the woman he had married was not bad-hearted, and made him "comfortable."

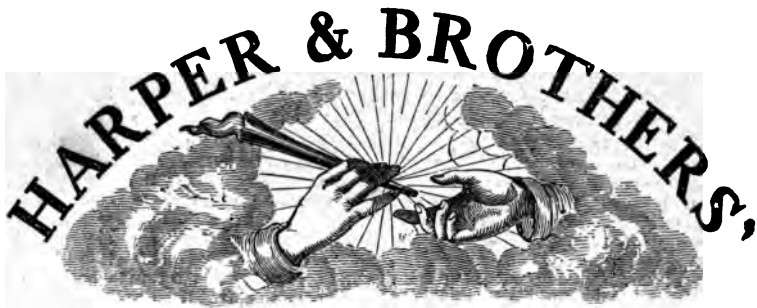
It was at Greythorpe, the house the Burmanders had had, and where Alice and Julian had first learned to know any thing of each other, that Alice and Julian "settled," when they came home to establish themselves in England, which was not till they had been between two and three years married.

Within a short drive of Greythorpe, and about the same distance from Heatherstone, lived Tom and Grace Blatchford. In the Blatchford's home there is a pretty, prim little Grace, and a sturdy, blustering young Tom. But Tom, the father, has ceased to bluster; and Grace, the mother, has lost her former self-complacency. She is now, what she has ceased to think herself, a remarkably sensible and right-minded, as well as an amiable, young woman.

And what is there to say of Sibyl—of Mrs. Colonel Dacre? The every thing that is nothing, or nothing that is every thing. Her heart is satisfied with love. To remind her she is mortal, and that mortal joy can not be perfect, phantom panics at times confront her—visions of sorrows to be—in that those in the flesh must one day put off the flesh.

THE END.

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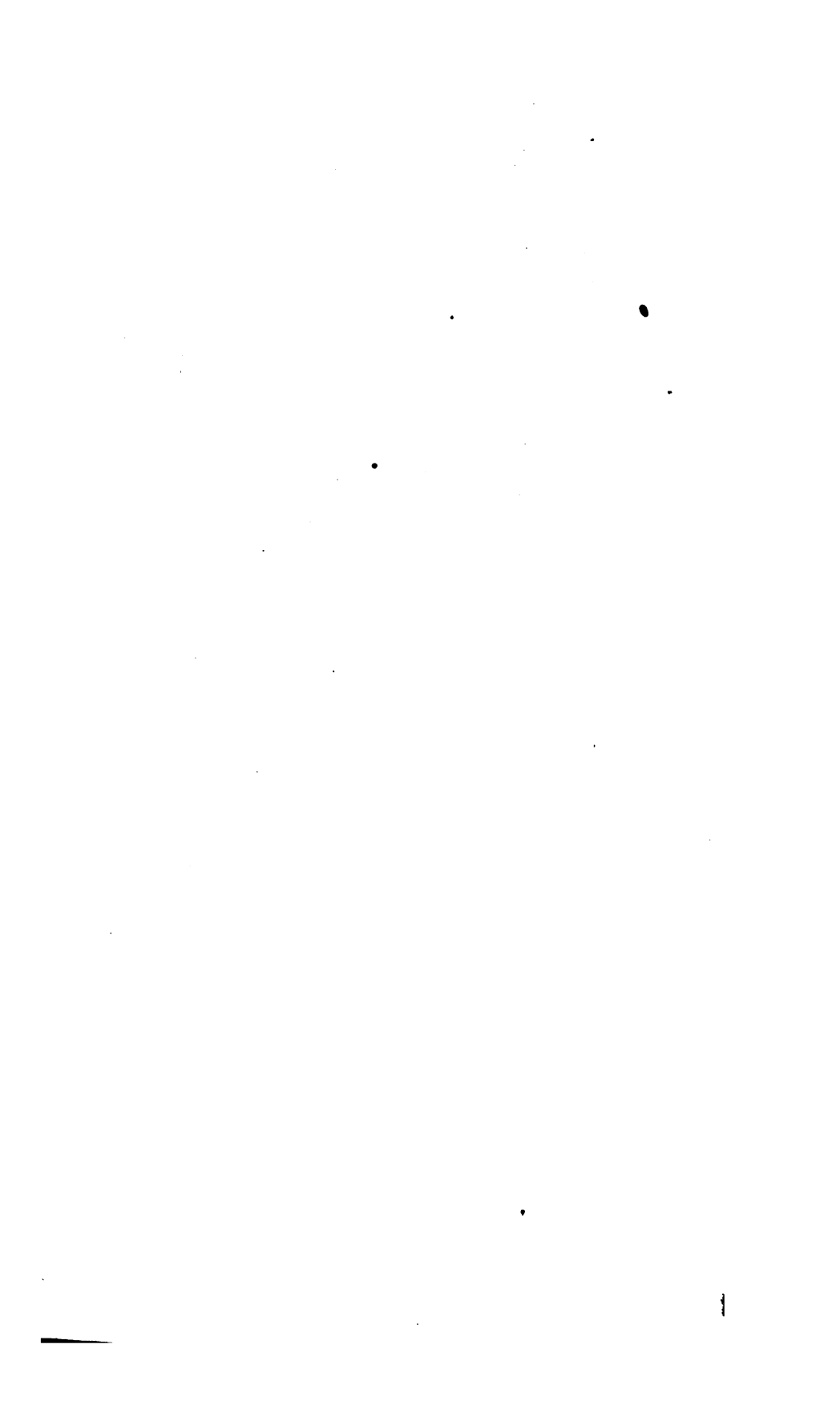
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